



MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY'S

FANTASY

Magazine
Issue #4

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"Hellhound"

by Deborah Wheeler

"A Winter's Tale"

by Laura Underwood

"Absinthe Eyes"

by Charlene Brusso

"Grey Wolf's Tale"

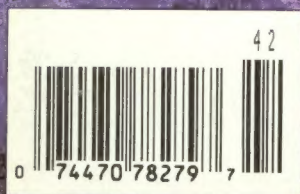
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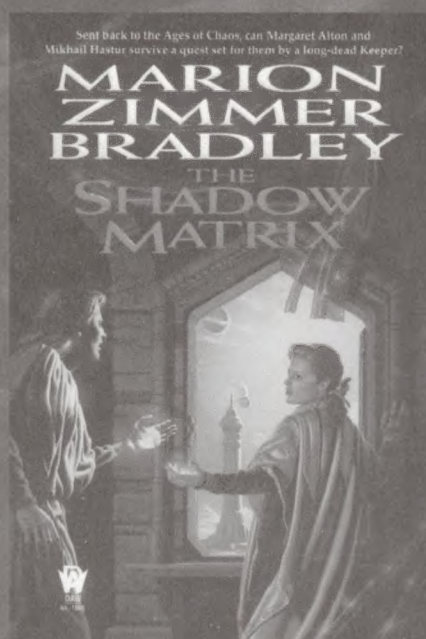
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Cover by Margaret Organ-Kean



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can Margaret Alton and
Mikhail Hastur survive a quest
set for them by a long-dead Keeper?

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A Novel of Darkover



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FANTASY Magazine

EDITORIAL



used to be rather scathing about people who emphasized "beautiful writing". You know the kind of story I mean — "beautifully written" but not a plot or a memorable character in a carload. In fact, my rejection paragraph #1 is "too much good writing", and I will continue to use it when I feel it is appropriate.

Yet words *do* count. A friend of mine used to say the difference between the exactly right word and the *almost* right word was like the difference between butter and butterfly.

Just imagine that most dramatic moment in the most dramatic of Sherlock Holmes mysteries. In **THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES**, Dr. Stapleton mentions a dreadful discovery —

"Mr. Holmes, they were the footprints of a gigantic hound!"

Now imagine if he had said, "Mr. Holmes, they were the footprints of a very big dog!"

Every now and then, a phrase will step out of context, as when Leonard di Caprio in the recent movie *THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK* said, "I wear the mask — it does not wear me." The difference is small — but on another level, it is enormous.

So I urge you — as I have done before — to choose your words carefully — to "put brain in gear before engaging keyboard."

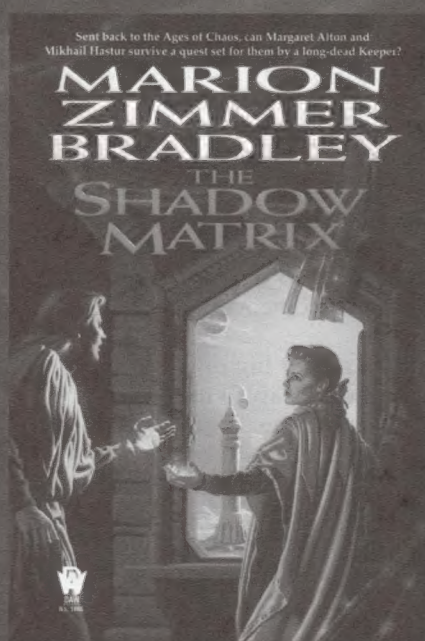
Think about what you're writing. When you write dialogue, read it out loud to yourself. If you were on a stage, could you "put it over"? How does it sound to you — and to us? If it doesn't sound right to you, it will never sound right to your audience. Or to me.

And if it doesn't sound right to me, I won't buy it.

Marion Zimmer Bradley



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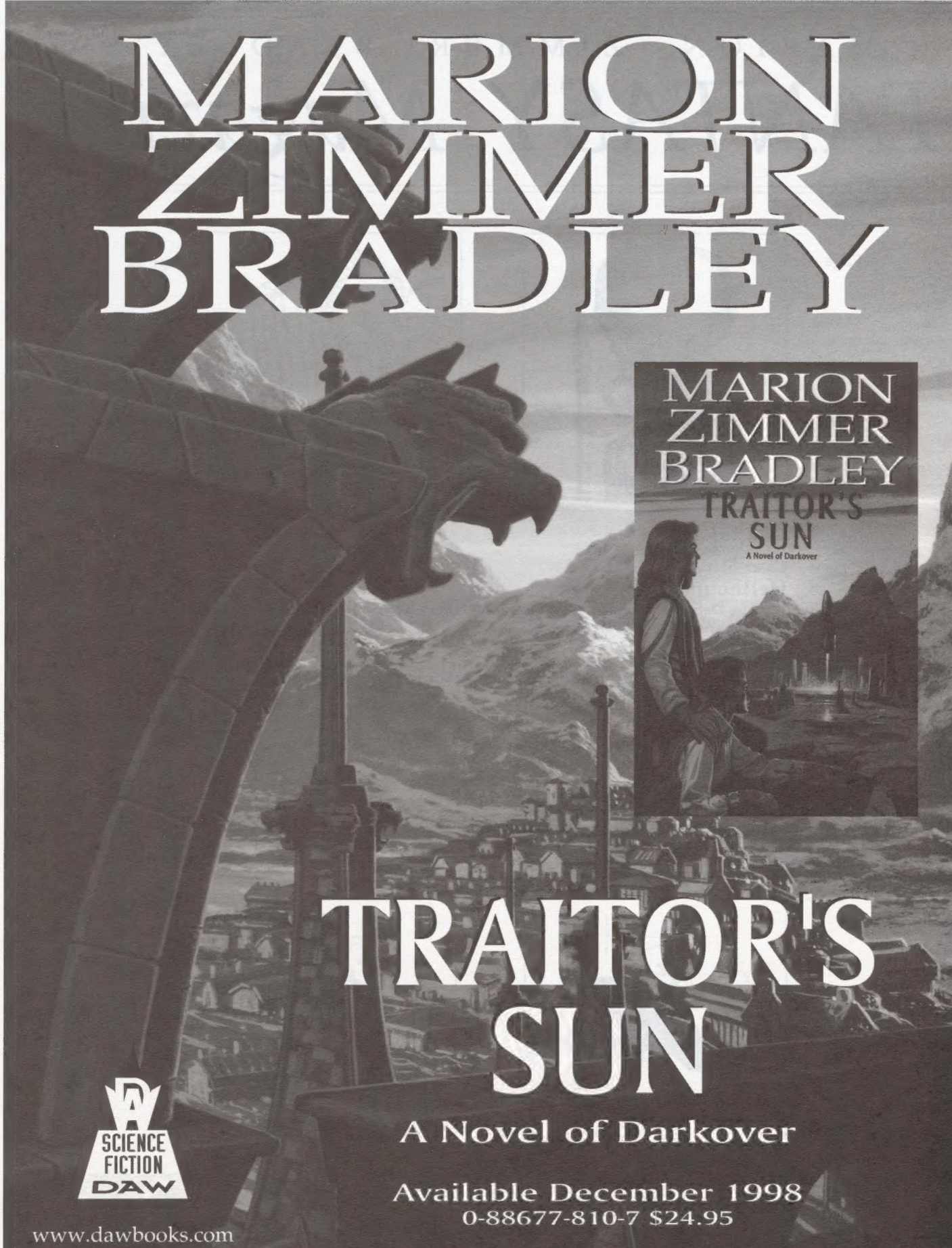
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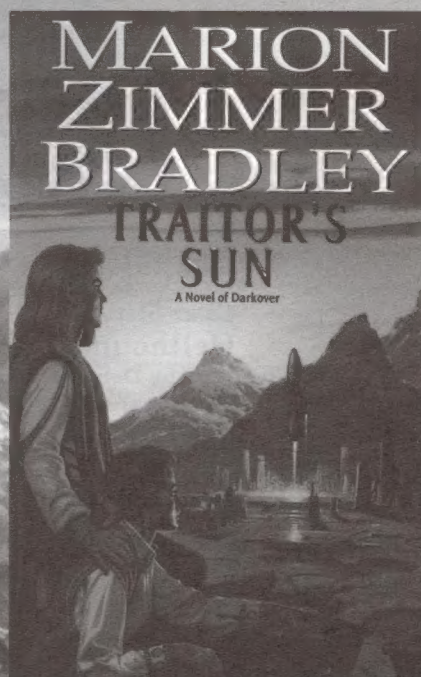
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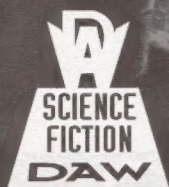


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Marion Zimmer Bradley's *FANTASY Magazine* welcomes free-lance submissions from people who have read our guidelines. All submissions must be accompanied by a self-addressed envelope with adequate return postage.

FANTASY Magazine, a quarterly, publishes original short fiction with fantasy elements in the range of 500 to 5,500 words. The most suitable length and the one most often purchased is between 3,500 and 4,000 words. While every precaution will be taken, we cannot assume liability for unsolicited manuscripts. A duplicate should be retained. Sample copies of the magazine are available for writers and artists at a special rate of \$4.00 including postage and handling. Requests for WRITERS' or ARTISTS' GUIDELINES should include a self-addressed stamped envelope.

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All written comments, questions, and suggestions regarding any aspect of the magazine are read by our editor and are assumed to be intended for publication. We reserve the right to edit all submissions. Letters must include sender's name and address.

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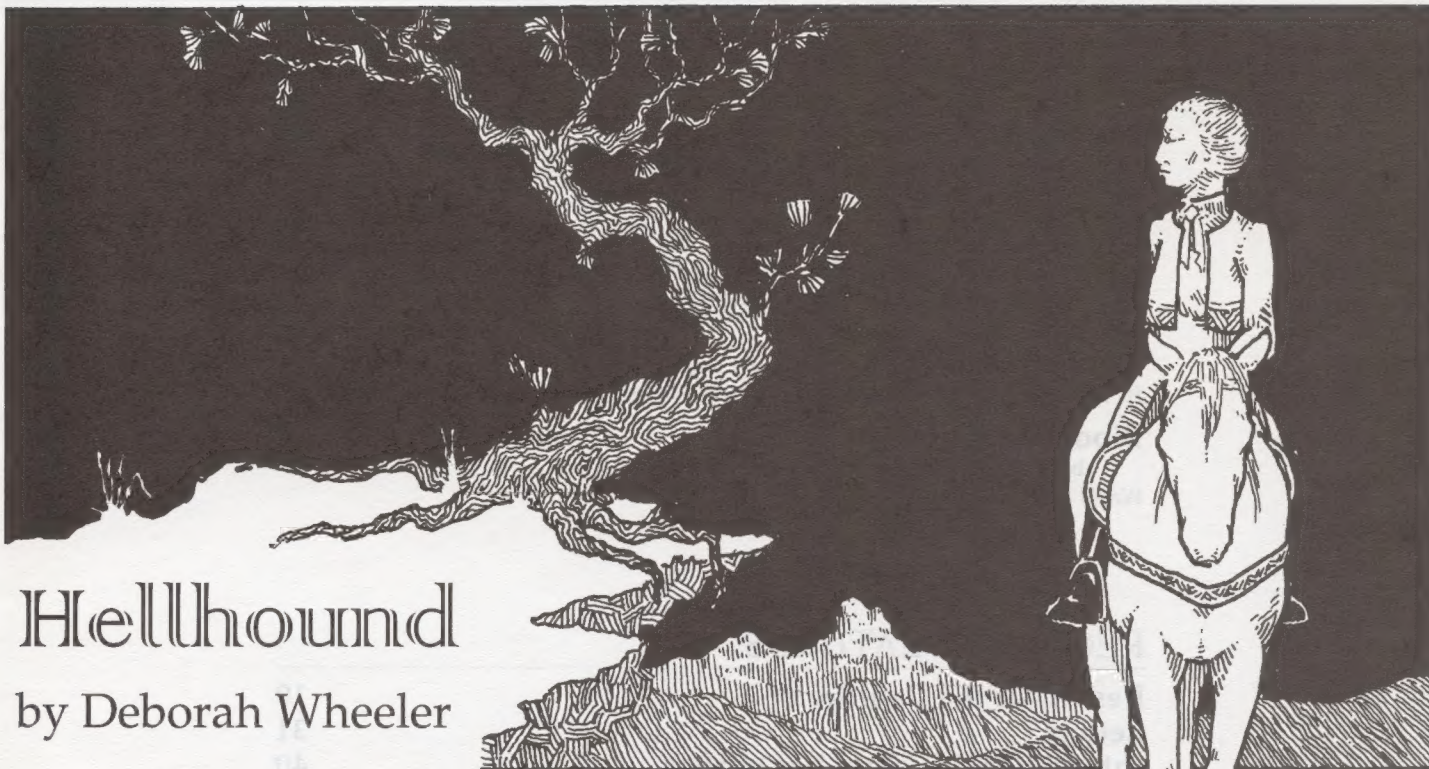
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Hellhound

by Deborah Wheeler

Day broke along the dragon-crest hills of the Altian Coast. Gulls wheeled overhead and shrieked out hateful names, as if we were the cause of all their sorrows. My partner, Shell, and I had run south last night, along the jagged lands leading to the sea. Our horses, heavy-headed, pulled at their bits to steal an occasional mouthful of saltgrass. The pungent smell stirred up things I didn't want to think about.

The run, as usual, had left me twitchy, jumping at shadows, and turned Shell's uncertain temper foul. The muted light faded the worst of her face, the seamy jig-dance patterns I knew like my own hand and could never read. Even now, I couldn't tell if she was angry or disappointed or just sick in her soul.

I lifted my eyes to the sky, as if I could read some comfort there. A blazing glory had swept out from the east, surging away the last of the hill-cleft darkness. The air shifted, restless. I took a deep breath and let it out, shuddering at the pleasure of it. In all my years of running, I'd never smelled anything as wild and sweet as the wind from the sea.

Shell's eyes flickered to the hellhound bitch, pacing beside us, panting, unbreathing. Silver was a thing of magic, made to run where no hound or mastiff ever could. The mages at Alt Lumina fashioned them of metal and crushed sea-pearls, the bones of still-

born boy-children and things it was forbidden to speak of. Silver had served Ereth, Shell's teacher before her. The hellhounds ran forever, it was said, the light from their eyes a beacon in the night.

Some believed the mages labored to make the hellhounds as penance for a mighty spell gone wrong. Others said that was why the ghost-lights first began to condense in the shadowed cut-up lands along the Altian Coast, to grow and strengthen until we runners drained them off and it was safe for ordinary folk to go out after dark. Some said there was a time when sleep was safe.

I knew nothing of these things. The darkness only gave shape to what was already there, festering in men's hearts. This I knew too well.

We clicked the horses into a jog. In the hell-light of the run, everything looked different, but the horses always brought us where we needed to be. We trusted their greed. Ahead meant town, and town meant hay and brushdown and rest.

Before long, we reached a little trading village, much like any other. Here we would find cod from the sea, flax and winter rye from the plains, mountain copper worked into medallion belts and mage-wire. We crossed a pleasant bridge and rode past the rows of plain frame houses with their familiar curving green-

tile
two
yel-
pot-
false-
silos,
and

roofs, an inn or
touched with
low paint and
ted thyme and
comfrey, corn
pens for goats

and hornless dewlapped cattle. A couple of barefoot kids raced out to gawk at us. In the eave-shadows, I glimpsed a woman with a face pale as flour, men's eyes gleaming.

The horses stumbled to a walk, their flint-iron shoes clinking on the stones in the dust. Shell and I got down and led them to the trough. My horse thrust its muzzle deep into the gray, scummy water. Its body heaved with its great, gulping swallows.

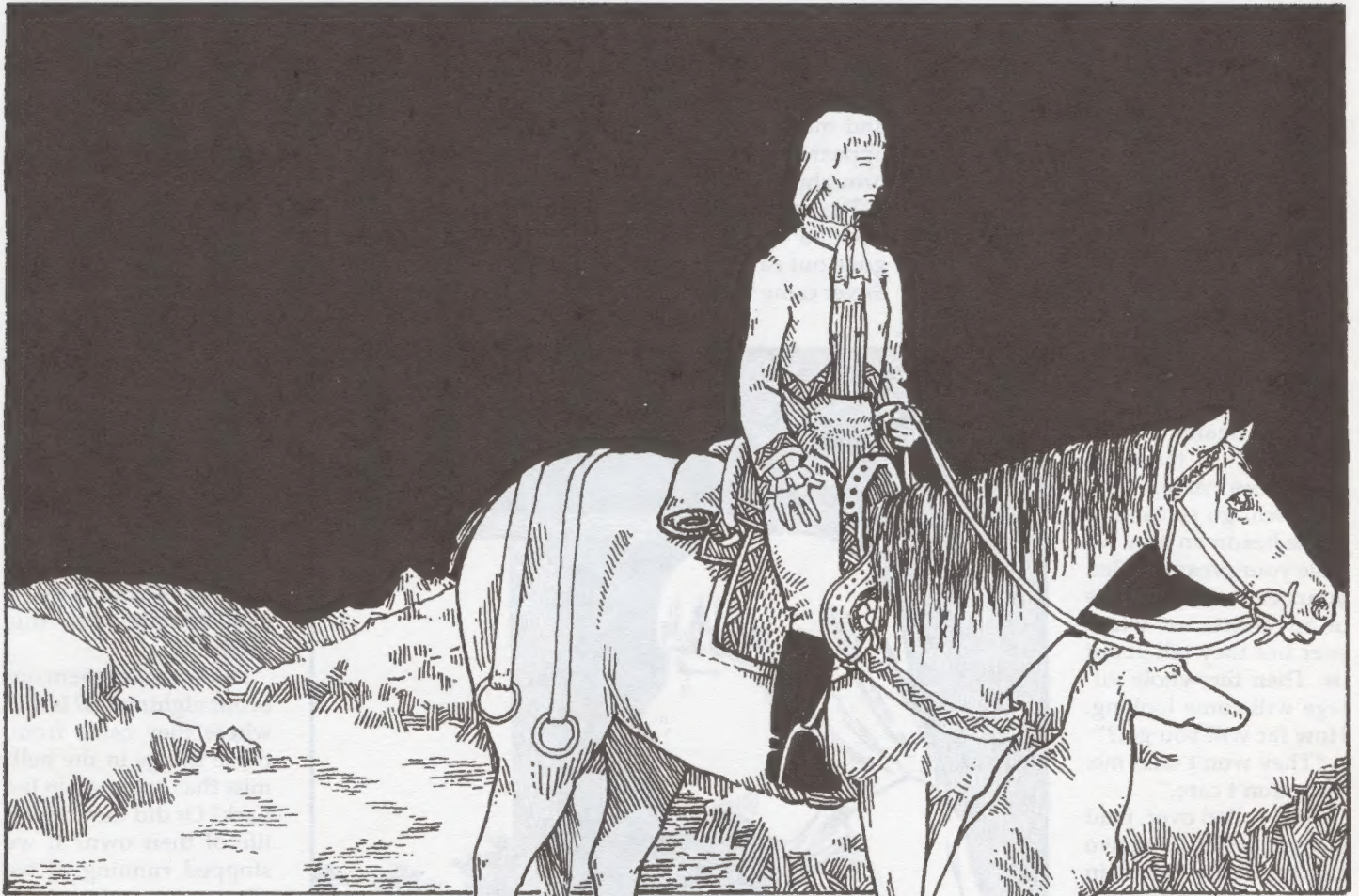
With her eyes, Shell skimmed the filled pens, the sunken flanks and staring ribs of the animals. The smells of fish and manure hung in the air, but never blended.

"Should have been here last full moon," I said. "People go crazy, cooped up like this, night after night."

"It's too much. We can't cover them all."

"What?" I teased. "You getting slow, old woman?"

She spat, a wad in the dust. I knew the metallic, bitter taste that filled her mouth. She meant I was right, she was getting old. Old and slow. We both knew the time for her to stop had passed, slipped away like tattered



clouds. Somewhere between the nights we ran together and the nightmares I knew nothing about, she'd kept going, running and running, and now it was too late.

In time, the same thing would happen to me.

My heart shivered in my body, crying out like a stricken child. Shell had made her choice. She wanted no more dreams of any kind. All my life, my choices had been made for me, and still I clung to something I could not put a name to, for fear it might turn out to be hope.

As we stood beside the trough, a shadow passed over Shell, but it was only a cloud in front of the sun. A town man came out, dressed in a jacket trimmed with braided strips of velvet, wool breeches buckled at the knee. He bowed as if his joints had never bent that way before. Maybe Shell knew him. I didn't. I'd been born in a place like this, but there's a lot I don't remember. I run and I rest and eat and sleep and then I run some more.

We followed the man to a barn. Over the doors, the builder had carved his

name, the date — over a century ago — and a quote from the Blessed Sage of Alt Gloria. Someone had painted eight-pointed stars and blinded eyes over the words.

The barn doors gaped, exhaling a musty smell. I wavered on my feet. "Gotta eat first," Shell said hoarsely and folded herself down on a pile of straw.

The man shoved a pottery dish into my hands — red glaze, black spiral figuring — full of something hot and spicy, shreds of goat meat with butter and soaked dried peaches. I raised it, tilted my head back, slid the mess down my throat. It left a lingering taste like honey. I'd hated sweets, back before I started running.

I held out my hand. "Silver. Here, Silver."

She came to me, as she never came to Shell. She laid her head in my hand and looked up at me. I felt the cool slickness of her hide, the tapering hardness of

her metal skull. Her eyes glinted up at me. Hellhound eyes, but never so for me. For me, shaded pink and amber, like memories of a place I wanted to go and could never quite remember.

Straw prickled along my back and rump. I heard the resonant crunch of the horses chewing and smelled rye grain, sweetroot, hay. A few yards away, Shell was wiping out her bowl with a fist-sized chunk of bread, a small meat pie waiting beside her feet. Above us came filtered golden light and the cooing of sea-doves.

Shell's racking snores filled my head as I drifted off. The only dreams which came to me were ordinary ones. Catnap dreams, as quickly forgotten.

I roused, choking. The bowl had fallen from my fingers. The horses were still munching their fool heads off. I couldn't tell from the light how much time had passed. A girl crept from the shadows, staring.

"Please...take me with you."

I took a good look at the girl. Eyes

like smudged mirrors, hungry. Small pink tongue darting across a child's full lips. No — no longer a child. Never again a child. The haunted glance told me that, the sweet new breasts.

The straw shifted under me. My voice growled, "You don't know what you're asking."

Her chin lifted. "It couldn't be worse."

Shell had woken up and was listening. I felt her stillness. Silver, who wasn't made to sleep, shifted her opal gaze from the girl to me and back again.

"Look." I tried to sound reasonable. "Your folks will go screaming to the headman how we stole your dreams, filled your head with promises of adventure, or whatever lies they tell about us. Then the whole village will come looking. How far will you get?"

"They won't miss me. They don't care."

Shell rolled over, mad enough to spit. "You two can go dance naked in the streets, just so I get some peace." She stuck her hands in her armpits, closed her eyes, and started snoring again.

I said to the girl, half-whisper, "You got a nice place here. You can marry some boy, have six brats, and sleep every night in a feather bed. Or 'prentice to one of those shops along the road. Weaver or baker or something. You got a choice."

"No more choice than you had." Sharp as a little knife used to gut fish, those words.

"Nobody *wants* to do what we do! To run your guts out, half a step ahead of things that would shrivel your eye-teeth, with only a hellhound to light the way —"

Silver, lying at my feet, whimpered. Shell snored a little more loudly.

"You can't come, that's all." I shoved the bowl into the girl's hands. She glared at me, then the light shifted across her eyes and she nodded, lips set as if she'd just made a bargain.

Holy Sage, please keep her here!

The next day, we slept and ate, roused when someone came in to rake up the horses' droppings or bring them water and more grain, coarse-cut rye. Food appeared for us, but I didn't see who brought it.

The afternoon of the second day, I decided to stretch my legs. Shell had gone out earlier without a word. Now Silver came with me, pacing next to my



knee, eyes glinting like pale pewter. I kept watching her, lying to myself that girl-children with haunted eyes and new breasts didn't run with hellhounds.

As I strolled through the village, it seemed that each stone, each wooden beam and roof tile, hid a secret shadow. A different shade of glaze perhaps, or a redder earth, rich with the clay that my uncle once worked into fine pots. Memories brushed against me, sunlight raising the hairs on my arms and neck.

My feet stumbled and the day turned cold.

I knew where Shell had gone. Years ago, when I first started running, I'd asked her how she got her name and she said from one of her lovers. I thought it must mean her woman's parts, pink and curved and secret. She asked me once would I and I said no. Nobody touches me, I said.

Now, she was hiding in those shadows that suggested too many things. Clawing her face, sucking her own blood, holding on to the pain to get through the hours when running wasn't enough.

My knees hurt. I'd fallen on them. Dust covered my pants. Some night, I knew, running wouldn't be enough for me, either. Wouldn't hold back the things I saw. Maybe even this night.

Did we make them out of our nightmares? Is that where they came from, those things in the hellmist that gathered in the dark? Or did they have a life of their own? If we stopped running, if we slit our own throats, if we turned to face them, would they still come for us?

Silver licked my face with her dry tongue. My arms went around her, my face against her shoulder. No heart beat inside that tapering body, no quiver of living muscle but cool, safe metal.

Night smeared the clouded sky with trails of blood. I sensed things stirring in the broken

hills that ran to the sea, could feel them in my bones and my quickening pulse and the sick crazy way my hands trembled.

I saddled up my horse. Shell came in while I was tightening the second girth. I didn't look at her eyes and she didn't look at mine. The only thing safe to look at was Silver's.

No one came out to watch us ride along the dirt street. Houses bolted up tight, keeping things in as well as out. Empty windows hid empty souls. The fever was rising in me, to think such

things.

We reached the edge of the village. There was no need to say anything to Shell. She felt it too when the first prickling *something* began along the back of my neck, that feeling of being followed, of don't-look-back. I pulled it to me, wrapped it around my heart, that and all the things I knew were waiting for me out there in the falling night.

Everything went gray and then sharp-smelling. The sky took on colors that had no name, inky secrets the color of lust and pain, the taste at the end of tears, the clatter of hooves over hard stone, hard stone hearts, striking impossible sparks.

The land began to rise around us. My heart speeded up some more. The horses tossed their heads, fighting the bit.

Go slow now, said the old wisdom passed from Ereth, Shell's teacher, and then to Shell, and now to me.

Let them know we are here. Let them come to us. Draw them from the hills, from the canyons where they lie festering. Out, out into the moonlight. Let the sea devour them.

A drumbeat began in my skull like footsteps behind a door that cannot be locked, close and closer now. My mouth went dry. My skin tingled. Shadows crept out from between the pleated hills. They thickened, like clotting blood.

Silver loped ahead of us now. When she turned her head I could see the faint ghostly light of her eyes, as if something inside of her kindled. There was no more light in the sky.

Then, besides the pounding in my head and the clash and clatter of the horses' hooves, came a whistling like wind funneling through the canyon. It gathered power from the shadows, thrilling along my nerves beyond the edge of hearing, just as it had on my first run.

I felt the shadows break even before

I saw them. Silver leapt into a full run. My horse, sensing the shift of my weight, took the bit in its teeth and bolted for the sea. I didn't need to look behind me. I knew what hovered in the air like torn clouds, reaching out for us with skeletal fingers. I knew the face I would see in that shifting nightmare storm. I knew the almost-empty eyes.

We were running flat out now, the horses' hooves barely skimming the

in the wailing, gibbering chaos that followed on our heels.

I hauled sideways on the reins and kicked my horse hard, forcing it in the girl's direction. I could see her face now, the terror dawning in her eyes.

She thought we ran from ghosts and nightmares. That's what they all thought. She had not known the nightmares had claws and eyes and whips. And hands.



The horse fought me, put its head down to buck. I twisted my fingers through its mane and leaned over, reaching out with my other arm. Prayed the girl would have the strength to hold on and swing up behind me, that the horse could carry both of us.

She stumbled toward me, hands raised. I booted the horse hard, felt its answering jolt of speed.

I caught the girl just below the shoulders, felt her weight leave the ground.

With a sudden squeal, the horse went down. I hit the broken earth and rolled, slammed one shoulder into something hard, scrambled to my feet.

The boiling ghost mass bore down on us like a wall.

"Get up!" someone screamed with my voice. The girl was on her hands and knees, struggling to rise.

But it was no use. The face I knew like the beating of my heart, the hands that came again and again in my darkest dreams.

They were here with all their poison distilled as it never was in life, not some anonymous ghost, but the only one that knew my name.

It called my name.

A bolt of silvery lightning jagged in front of me, hell-eyes blazing and teeth slashing. The roiling clouds broke. I wheeled, dragged the girl to her feet, and ran as if I too were a thing made only for running.

My feet slipped on loose gravel, sank into sand. Fire seared my lungs. Somehow I kept going. Every time the girl

rough ground, their heads down, ears slicked back. Shell was screaming, bent over her mount's sweating neck. I couldn't hear her words above my own, for these were things we never asked each other.

The canyon narrowed abruptly. Silver raced before us, a ghostly ripple. Then, in the dim reflection of her light, I saw something move along the canyon wall. A human shape in boy's breeches, hair like a plaited ebony ribbon. The girl from the village.

"No!" I cried, and my voice was lost

stumbled, she almost pulled my arm out of its socket. Then came a cry like a steel blade screaming before it breaks.

Shell skittered her horse to a halt in front of me. Her mouth was a slash of white. I shoved the girl forward. Shell reached down, wheeled the horse, and then suddenly the girl was up, face hidden, braid flying.

"Go!" I screamed, but they were already gone. Shell whipped the horse hard. Its hooves struck sparks on the stone.

I turned around, the hardest thing I'd ever done. I wanted to see it coming, the thing that made me welcome death. But here came Silver, staggering, falling, somehow still running, and the light in her eyes was not the chill blaze of hell but that sweet moony glimmer. She was not alive, had never been, could not suffer what the gibbering mass would do to her, but she was mine, the only thing that ever truly cared for me.

And for that, I would not let them have her.

Silver came into my arms. She hardly seemed to weigh anything, as if all the life in her had been used up, burnt like a leaping flame. I held her tight and ran.

Claws slashed behind from my heels. Stinking breath ruffled the hairs on my neck. Inarticulate, snarling promises echoed through my ears, crooning hunger and misery and greed. But I, for the first time I could remember, I had something more.

Silver turned her head to look ahead of us. The pale clear light of her eyes shone out on the trail. I could hear the waves crashing, smell the sea-wind. I threw myself forward. My heart labored in my chest as if it would burst. I drew ahead of the ghost mass.

The light from Silver's eyes strengthened and I rushed toward it. I clung to the cold hell-eyed beacon I had fol-

lowed for so many years, to the moony light that was Silver's gift.

My foot hit a rock and I toppled forward. Breath burst from my body. I heard nothing beyond the shrieks of hatred and hunger. Clutching Silver, I hauled myself to my feet and turned to face the boiling gray mass. I could see the faces clearly, the ones I never knew when they were alive and the one I remembered so well. The face, the breath.

The touch.

I had nowhere to run, nowhere to hide. But in that moment, I left behind everything I had been. Light flooded every corner of my mind and heart. Silver's light, the only thing it was ever safe for me to love. If only I could give myself to it, all of myself, then there would be nothing left of me for the nightmares to take.

The ghost wall hit. The impact tumbled me like a piece of drift caught in the pounding surf. The hills, the stretch of dim-lit sand and saltgrass, all vanished from my eyes.

Then somehow I was running again and the light shone clear and sure before me. The night took on a sweet wild fragrance, every star, every grain of sand etched in my perfect sight. The beach with its mirror-bright waves grew nearer with each bounding stride. There was no more torment in my soul, only a singing joy. Beneath me, four slender legs danced across the ground, stretching their mage-crafted joints. Wind flowed around my sleek metal frame. Power rushed through me, all the strength I would ever need. I could run like this for years. I no longer had a heart to burst.

Ahead, the ghost mass was already scattering over the bitter-clean sea, losing substance and power with every passing instant. Bits of glowing cloud tore across the ebony heavens and quickly faded.

Two women drew a lathered horse to a halt, turned and looked back toward me. Their faces burned with their human pain, with the taste of blood and terror and despair. They saw only Silver racing toward them. They thought I was dead, consumed.

And so I was, but not in the way they thought. I had found my thing to love and nothing — not on earth and certainly not in hell — could ever part us now.

With moony light streaming from my hellhound eyes, I ran to them. To be a beacon through the long night of the soul. To serve them with the loyalty and love which was all that was left of me.

Me ... and Silver.

✱

DEBORAH WHEELER started writing stories in the 4th grade, some time around the Mesozoic Era and kept on writing through degrees in biology and psychology, work as a bacteriologist, a librarian, and a preschool gym teacher. In between two children, a black belt in kung fu, and a chiropractic career, she's sold two novels and three dozen short stories. Her two novels from DAW are **JAYDIUM** and **NORTHLIGHT**. Some recent/forthcoming short stories are "Transfusion" (*Realms of Fantasy*), "Survival Skills" (**SISTERS OF THE NIGHT**, Warner), "Unmasking the Ancient Light" (**ANCIENT ENCHANTRESSES**, DAW) "Sing to Me of Love and Shadows" (**RETURN TO AVALON**, DAW) and "Goatgrass" (**TALES FROM JABBA'S PALACE**, Bantam Spectra).

MARGARET ORGAN-KEAN works as a tech writer and systems analyst in addition to her artwork assignments from *Cricket*, *MZBFM*, and *Wizards of the Coast* (where she illustrated cards in the **MAGIC** deck, and was the artist and designer for all cards in *The Great Dalmuti*).

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Dragon logo by Alicia Austin

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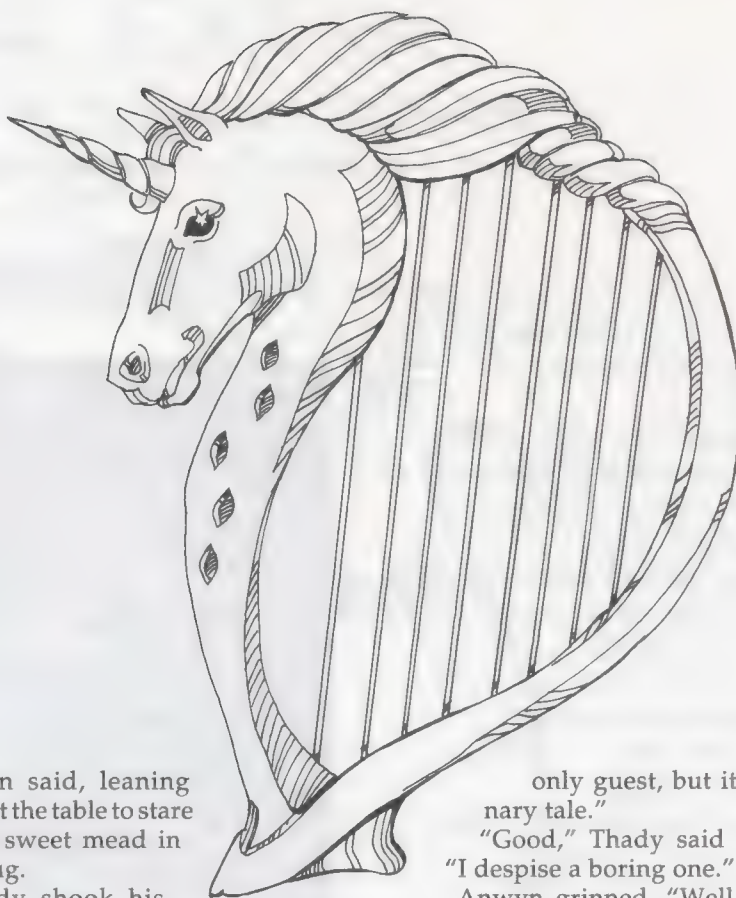
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A Winter's Tale

by Laura J. Underwood



The inn was terribly quiet, but then it was winter and few travelers would be traversing these snowy mountain roads as Anwyn Baldomyre did. He was on his way home to Nymbaria and eventually Far Reach, having spent several seasons roaming the vast realm of Lamboria.

The only inhabitant of the inn was an older man, the innkeeper himself, one Thady by name. Whiteheaded and stocky of build, his kind face and fatherly manner quickly put the harper at ease. Thady treated Anwyn more like family, setting a fair meal, and joining him at the table. The old man indulged in his own store of mead, and spun a tale of his soldiering days and of retiring to open an inn. Of a son who left to serve elsewhere and a daughter now wed to a crofter's lad. And of a wife who left him two winters back when the gods called her.

"I'm sorry to hear that," Anwyn said when the tale faltered.

"'Twas her time lad, and besides, I've still got me inn to keep me warm." Thady gestured to the room around him. "Though as ye can see, there's not much business this time of the year. You'll have your pick of sleeping quarters."

"You've no other guest then?"

Anwyn said, leaning against the table to stare at the sweet mead in his mug.

Thady shook his head. "I fear there be none but meself to listen to you play, though I'll gladly do so."

"And I'll gladly play, even for one," Anwyn said.

He pushed his mug aside and reached into the sack, drawing forth Glynnanis. The magical harp's strings hummed softly as Anwyn danced fingers across them to test the tuning. The sapphire eyes set in the white wood carved with the head of a unicorn glittered when the light struck them.

"By the Four," Thady said, staring in wonder. "There must be quite a tale in that. How did you ever come by such a wondrous harp, lad?"

"It's a long story," Anwyn said.

"I've got all night," Thady replied with a grin and hefted his mug in a salute.

Dare I reveal so personal a tale to a stranger? Anwyn thought. Years had passed since he and Rhystar spoke of those matters. Some of the memories were still full of sweet pain.

"Well," Anwyn said, "I can't refuse a man who sets such a fine table for his

only guest, but it's no ordinary tale."

"Good," Thady said cheerfully. "I despise a boring one."

Anwyn grinned. "Well, it started seven springs ago when I was very young, and very much in love ..."

"What was her name?" Thady interrupted with a grin.

Anwyn hesitated for the question caught him off guard. "His name was Brennan bho Rhyllian, and he was the eldest son of the Duke of Caerlon who had been foully murdered ..."

"You were in love with a man?" Thady blurted.

Anwyn felt his face burn, for in some parts of the world, his desires were as forbidden as his magic. "Well, yes," he said, glancing cautiously at his host. "Though I was afraid to tell him so."

Thady looked into his mug and shook his head. His eyes had grown rheumy under the mead's warm blessing. "And here I thought I had seen much of the world. Why would you love a man?"

"Why should it not be?" Anwyn asked. "Love is love, and as long as both consent and neither is hurt by it ..." Words that Rhystar had spoken often, the harper mused.

Thady shrugged. "Sorry. I meant no offense. I'm not one to judge a man by

his heart's desire. Only his deeds. Go on with your tale, harper."

Anwyn nodded and sighed. "We had gone from Caerlon to Far Reach over the course of a fortnight. There, we met Rhystar who was not exactly pleased to see us at first. He asked why we had sought him, and Brennan told his tale. How his kingdom had been seized by his stepmother Elena, who was a sorceress. How he was tortured and lost his eye to her evil servant, Kalamar. Rhystar knew the creature's name as soon as it was spoken. The very mention of it brought such pain to his face, and he insisted on seeing the damage Kalamar had done to Brennan's eye. We thought then Rhystar would agree to help us ..."

The air in the room crackled with tension as Anwyn sat on the stool by Rhystar's chair, gently plucking notes from his little mahogany harp. Brennan paced up and down like a beast scenting prey. His long blond hair, drawn back in a tether, snapped like an angry stallion's tail as he stopped before Rhystar.

"Why?" Brennan said, gesturing to the patch over his left eye. "If you know what Kalamar is, why won't you help us?"

Anwyn looked up when Rhystar's opaque gaze fell on him. Pain hid under the stoic mask the mage wore.

"Because I long ago ceased to care about the affairs of men," Rhystar said.

"Then we have wasted our time coming here," Brennan said.

"It would seem so," Rhystar said, still watching the harper. "Anwyn, you play well. Can you sing something more becoming to your skills than the off-colored ballad you sang to me in the courtyard?"

Anwyn nodded, softly beginning a song of love and desire. For moments, only his voice and harp filled the hall, but then, Rhystar suddenly rose from his chair, muting anguish under a quiet façade.

"Excuse me," he muttered. "I am tired and wish to be alone now. I will take you back to your rooms."

Anwyn stopped playing and singing, puzzlement filling his silver eyes. The mage reached out to touch the youth's smooth cheek, a brush so gentle it sent shivers of anticipation down Anwyn's spine. Then abruptly, Rhystar and started from the hall.

Anwyn wished he could soften the

seething rage that burned in Brennan's face, but the young lord of Caerlon looked as though he would allow no such comfort just now. Brennan stiffened his shoulders and glared as he marched after the mage. Swallowing, Anwyn could do no more than follow.

"How did Rhystar know this Kalamar?" Thady asked. They had moved from the table to a pair of comfortable chairs before the hearth. Anwyn's fingers were tripping light melodies from Glynnanis's strings.

"It was Rhystar who long ago summoned Kalamar across into this world, and with that summoning, came death," Anwyn said. "There was a harper named Colyn with whom Rhystar was deeply in love. The day that Rhystar tried to capture Kalamar's heartstone, Colyn insisted on watching. He too had silver eyes but, like myself, he loved his music more. Colyn was using a spell song to protect himself, but Kalamar proved stronger than Rhystar imagined. The fiend saw a weakness by which he could devise his own escape. He called fire to strike Colyn, burned him, and when Rhystar saw this, he lost control of the spell. Kalamar broke free, but he stayed in this world rather than returning to his own. For years, he tried to hurt Rhystar, to make him pay for bringing Kalamar across, but Rhystar was well protected. Then, by some means, Elena managed to trap Kalamar's heartstone and enslave him. And Rhystar spent many years mourning Colyn, at least, until I came to Far Reach.

"He once told me, he thought I was part of Kalamar's terrible retribution ..."

Anwyn had gone out on the balcony to play for himself, but it was too cold to stay there for long. He returned to the chamber and bustled himself before the burning fire, setting his harp aside and extending numb fingers towards the heat. His skin tingled, then grew too hot to bear the proximity, so he drew back, throwing off his cloak and turning to face the room.

The master of Far Reach stood at the foot of Anwyn's bed, his face haggard in the amber light. Anwyn gasped and drew back a step, and Rhystar smiled.

"Sorry," he said. "I didn't mean to startle you. I heard you playing and realized you were still awake. Forgive me."

Anwyn took a deep breath, feeling

uneasy under the scrutiny of those pale eyes. *Why does he look at me that way?*

"What ... can I do for you?" he asked.

"It is more what I can do for you," Rhystar said. "I have come to make amends for my hasty refusal earlier."

Anwyn's eyes widened. "Then you're going to help us?"

"I am going to help you," the mage said, his voice lowering to a softness that sent a pleasant chill across Anwyn's skin.

"Why?"

Rhystar looked amused. "Come with me," he said, "and I'll show you something beyond your imagination."

Anwyn hesitated as the mage started for the door. After all, Anwyn had not heard Rhystar enter the room, and a quick glance revealed the bolt was still thrown from within — Brennan's idea. The young lord thought locked doors would be a wise precaution.

Rhystar reached the door, slipping the bolt free ever so quietly. Slowly, Anwyn crossed the room. The mage stepped into the hallway and looked back.

"Anwyn?" Rhystar said.

Anwyn hesitated once more. "Where are we going? Shouldn't Brennan come along too?"

"The young lord is asleep," Rhystar said. "There is no reason to disturb him, unless you do not trust me."

To blurt "yes" would have been rude. Anwyn held his tongue. Rhystar sighed and stepped back into the room, stretching forth a hand. Anwyn looked at the hand, then took it, and felt the strength in those fingers that gently closed about his own.

"I swear by all that is sacred to me that I mean you no harm, Anwyn Baldomyre," Rhystar said. "What I wish to show you has to do with magic and is in another part of my keep. Can you read music?"

Anwyn nodded.

"Good." Rhystar released the hand and took Anwyn's arm in a firm grasp, ushering the youth out into the hall. Anwyn found himself unable to resist the sincerity in those eyes, no more than he could overcome the curiosity overpowering his fear. "A long time ago," the mage continued, "a harper I knew wrote a set of songs at my request. They're very special songs, and I think you will find them quite useful when you challenge Kalamar."

Anwyn stopped, pulling free. "When I challenge Kalamar! But ... Brennan is

the one who wants to stop him! I wouldn't be of any use to him in a fair fight! I don't even know how!"

"You will," Rhystar said with a quick glance at Brennan's door, and Anwyn cringed from the echo of his own voice raised in protest. Yet Brennan did not come forth to indicate he had been disturbed. The mage merely shook his head and resumed his pace down the hall, urging Anwyn to follow. "A creature of Kalamar's ilk cares naught for what is considered fair in a fight. At least, what I show you will give you the power to protect yourself."

"With a song?" Anwyn insisted, recalling Brennan's teasing words weeks ago when Anwyn suggested singing to brigands if they attacked him. "How

can I protect myself from a creature like Kalamar with a song?"

"You shall see if you will cease all this chattering and follow me," Rhystar said and smiled reassuringly. He continued on, and Anwyn hesitated only for a moment more before bolting after the tall figure.

Songs and magic? This he had to see!

"So you went with him, not knowing what he had in mind?" Thady said. His words sounded thick with mead's buzz, and even Anwyn felt a little light-headed. "Forgive me, lad, but that wasn't so wise, you hardly knowing the man and him being a mage."

"I saw no reason not to," Anwyn said, hugging Glynnanis close. "Nor

had I any reason to regret what happened that night. It changed my life, made me aware many things. He took me into the very depths of Far Reach, and I began to understand how the place got its name ..."

The hall led to a circular room, and from the center, stairs disappeared into a hole. Rhystar took this path, descending into the depths. Still uncertain, Anwyn followed, wondering when and where the head-spinning turns would end, when they abruptly spilled into another hall that ran a short distance under an archway. The space suddenly opened out into a room so large, Anwyn could barely make out the dome of the ceiling. There was a ring of stone arches like the one they had entered through, enclosing a central circle marked with runes and strange symbols he did not understand. He walked around the edge, studying the design from various angles.

"What is this?" he asked.

"A conjuring circle," Rhystar said and made his way across the vast chamber to pass through another arch. "A place where one draws power or keeps it at bay." His voice echoed from the opening. In a moment, he returned, carrying a chest under one arm. "Step inside, and you're safe from any of the magics I have released in this place for my protection. Cross the line, and one of those creatures might just claim you for an evening's repast."

Anwyn looked about him. "What manner of creatures?"

"Oh, you needn't worry," Rhystar said. "You won't see them so long as I'm here. They only come out when I leave."

"Why?" Anwyn stepped into the circle with the mage. Rhystar set the chest on the floor and knelt to open the lid.

"To protect this place from intruders."

Anwyn squatted on the far side of the chest. "You don't much like intruders, do you?"

Rhystar looked up for a moment, wearing an indulgent smile. "Intruders, no," he said. "Guests are another matter. However, some of the magics I've invoked cannot distinguish one from the other."

"Do you get many guests, then?"

"No," Rhystar said. "Few folk ever come to Far Reach these days. One or two mages I have known a long time,



though I sometimes think they come to see if I have grown weak. Once, I had visitors by the score, looking for my assistance in one matter, seeking my advice in another. Occasionally, there were enemies among them who coveted my power and were foolish enough to challenge me for it. Jealousy is not uncommon among sorcerous folk — or greed. Even those I call friend are not to be trusted. The thirst for power and knowledge does that to our kind."

Anwyn chewed his lip as Rhystar opened the lid of the chest with a wave of his hand. "You must be very lonely, then," the harper said.

Rhystar paused, his opaque gaze rising to meet the youth's argent stare. Again, Anwyn was struck by the feeling those eyes looked through him. Nonsense!

The mage sighed, a melancholy mask converting his features. "Yes, sometimes, I do get lonely, Anwyn." He dropped his gaze to the contents of the chest, reaching in and drawing out several scrolls of paper. The first of these was offered to the harper.

When Anwyn touched the paper, he felt a faint tingle, like static crackling the parchment. Slowly, he unrolled the first sheaf. It was yellowed with age, and the lines and symbols of black ink had turned a little brown with the passage of time. Anwyn scanned the notes, then turned to the word written at the top.

"Fire," he said. "Is that the title?"

"In a sense," Rhystar said, releasing his staff. It remained upright on its own as the mage sat on the floor and began spreading a series of scrolls out for Anwyn's view. They crawled back and forth on their hands and knees, looking at each song in turn. Air, water, earth, fire, ice, storm, wind, rain, gate, healing, breaking, easing a heart, sleep. Anwyn stared at each song, wonder filling his head and heart. He would try humming a few notes of one when Rhystar would excitedly point to another and thrust it before the youth's gaze, explaining its purpose. Lightning, warmth, stone, love, food. Anwyn laughed at the last one.

"Food?" he said in a merry voice.

"If you are hungry, you must eat," Rhystar said. "If there is no food available, why not sing for your supper?"

"That's ridiculous!"

"Perhaps," Rhystar agreed with a grin. "Colyn thought it was great fun to sing forth a feast."

"Colyn?"

"The harper who composed these Songs for me. He wrote the music, and I gave it power. We were quite pleased with the results of our labors. These Songs require a perfect voice, one that can sing notes with precision, like yours. They require a certain amount of concentration and the will to make them work ... among other things."

"How do they work?"

Rhystar picked up Fire. "Have you memorized this one?"

Anwyn took the scroll, humming the tune in his throat. He looked up and nodded. "Yes, but what about the words?"

"No words needed. Your voice is an instrument. Use it thus."

Anwyn looked around. "So what must I do now?"

Rhystar gathered the rest of the scrolls into a pile near the box. With a wave of his hand, a torch appeared, unlit dry wood with one end frayed. The scent of oil filled Anwyn's nostrils as the torch hovered in the air.

"Light the torch," Rhystar said.

"Where's the tinder?" Anwyn asked.

The mage rolled his eyes and gently slapped a hand across the top of the harper's head. "You are the tinder, you young jackanapes! Sing the Song of Fire, and concentrate your thoughts on the torch. By your will and your voice, if you have the power, you will light it."

Anwyn frowned, sitting back on his heels. "But, I'm not a mage," he said.

"Yes, you are," Rhystar replied, catching Anwyn's chin with his long fingers. "You were born a mage."

"Why do you say that?" the harper said, his voice quavering with uncertainty.

"Your eyes, my lad. Have you not noticed the color?"

Anwyn sighed. "They're silver."

"Does anyone else in your family have silver eyes?"

"No." Anwyn shook his head.

"Do you know what silver eyes mean?"

Again, the harper shook his head, dread creeping through his stomach.

"At the dawn of time, the Four decreed that those born to the power of magic would be known by eyes of grey or silver," Rhystar said. "And since that time, all born with argent eyes have had a gift for magic. The more silver to the eyes, the more power. Mind you, the strongest magics still require

study and a sacrifice, but the way is worth the price for those who love magic."

Swallowing, Anwyn drew back so he was free of the mage's grasp. He lowered his eyes and shook his head. His stomach tightened with fear. "I... know nothing of magic," he said. "I'm only a harper."

"Anwyn, I am offering you music that is magic." The mage held a scroll under the harper's nose. "I am offering you a chance to save yourself from Kalamar. The Songs are a magic you can use. Your silver eyes mean you possess the power to make these Songs work. Mind you, without making the proper sacrifice to release your potential, you can only use the Songs about once a day. The strain of untrained power could kill you otherwise."

Anwyn hesitated, nervously using the end of one fingernail to rip at another. He turned back to the torch. Could he light it?

"You will never know unless you try," Rhystar said and stood.

Anwyn nodded, taking a deep breath to relax the knots snagging his muscles. Rising slowly, he stared at the torch, fixing it with his metallic gaze. Another deep breath, and he hummed the notes of the Fire Song in his throat. For a moment, he closed his eyes, and when he opened them again, Rhystar had drawn back, leaving a clear path between the harper and the torch.

Anwyn opened his mouth and let his voice pour forth, spilling the notes of the Song. Warmth surrounded him, and his blood felt hot, racing under his skin, like fire growing inside his body. He could feel the flames lapping sinew and bone. A tingle filled the air around him. His flesh burned as though he were the torch. He drove his will against the wood and oil. The Song rushed from him, louder and stronger, each note perfectly shaped and pitched into the air. Around him, the heat increased, and sweat ran rivulets from his chest and back, plastering his hair to his brow. He strained to stay on his feet, to keep from fainting in the ghastly inferno, willing the fire to go to the torch.

It exploded to flame like a miniature bonfire, and the heat immediately left Anwyn's body. He felt like a great weight had fallen from his shoulders, and the sudden lightness made him so dizzy, he dropped to his knees.

Arms surrounded him and laughter filled the air.

"Anwyn, you did it!" Rhystar hauled the youth off the ground, swinging him around with a shout of joy. "My bright lad, you did it!"

Lips pressed warmly to his, and the warmth of that kiss made Anwyn gasp. He pulled back as it brought a new fire to his skin ... much like the desire for Brennan's kiss he had repressed so long. Rhystar was smiling, but that joy rapidly vanished under a mask of shame.

"Forgive me," he said. "I am sorry ... I ... quite forgot myself with the beauty of the moment. You must forgive me. I should never have ..."

He released Anwyn and turned away. The harper felt giddy, light-headed and warm. All pleasant sensations that took his breath away.

"What?" Anwyn asked. "Have I done something wrong?"

Rhystar shook his head. "I should not have been so bold. Believe me, I am so sorry. I ..."

Anwyn stepped forward, touching the mage's arm. "I ... didn't mind," he said. "I ..." His face warmed, and he dropped his gaze. "I rather liked it. I'm sorry if I upset you."

Rhystar turned back, brushing a hand across the harper's cheek. Anwyn managed a warm smile. There was disbelief in the mage's eyes.

"Anwyn, have you ever ... loved anyone before?" the mage asked.

Anwyn shrugged. "My father and mother ... my brothers and sisters ... and Brennan."

One white brow rose. "How do you love him?"

Anwyn shrugged. "I sometimes, I want him to hold me ... and to kiss me ... just as you did."

"And will he?"

Anwyn shook his head, hot tears spilling from his eyes. "Brennan will never love me as I love him. He loves Ygraine ..."

"Oh, Anwyn, I am sorry," Rhystar said, drawing the youth into his arms. Anwyn leaned against the folds of the robe padding the strong shoulder and smelling of herbs and spices and other strangely comforting things, and let the tears flow as he wept.

"I told Rhystar everything after that," Anwyn said, blinking as a tear tried to escape. "It was like letting go of every fear I felt. And he didn't make fun of me or chide me. He told me all about Colyn and how the pain of his death still hurt. One thing led to another and

before I knew it, he was telling me what I had always wanted to know."

He stared at the fire beyond the stone hearth. Thady refilled two mug with mead, slopping a little over the rims as he heated them with the iron. He set one next to Anwyn before tumbling into the other chair.

"He taught me many things about myself that night," Anwyn said, "especially not to be ashamed of my feelings. I couldn't wait to tell Brennan how I felt about him, but he ... he thought there was something wrong with the way Rhystar behaved and in spite of the fact that Rhystar was teaching me magic that might help us battle Kalamar, Brennan decided we would leave Far Reach. I didn't want to go, but Brennan seemed so angry about something that made no sense to me."

"We were on the road back to Nymbaria when I decided to tell him how I felt ... I was such a fool. Brennan didn't like the news. He was angry at first and struck me. Then, he accused Rhystar of corrupting me, and all I could do was weep until I felt ill. When he saw how he'd hurt me, he swore he didn't hate me. That he loved me as a little brother ... a dear friend ... but never could he love me as I loved him. That hurt worse than any blow, and I thought I would die ..."

"I'm sorry, but your friend sounds like a bit of a fool," Thady said. "I hope you left him and went back to Rhystar."

"I couldn't," Anwyn said, realizing his eyes felt as teary as they had that day. *Lords and Ladies, will I ever be rid of this pain?* "We had much to do, so we went back to Nymbaria, only to learn the worse had happened."

"The worse?" Thady looked worried. "What could be worse than learning the one you love doesn't share that feeling?"

"While Brennan and I were on our way to Far Reach, Elena captured the small village of Thryst on the border of Nymbaria, taking the folk hostage and demanding that High Lord Syndovan give Ygraine in marriage to Brennan's younger brother Holdyn."

"Poor lass," Thady said.

"She was very brave. They took her to Caerlon's capital and made her a prisoner in what should have been her home. The young page who acted as her secret messenger was found out. Elena's familiar, an evil demon in the guise of a cat, nearly killed him."

"That was when Brennan and High

Lord Syndovan decided to send me to Caerlon. I pretended to be a harper visiting the capital and offered to entertain Caerlon's household, and I was able to deliver a message to Ygraine to let her know Brennan had returned, but somehow, Kalamar knew me. He and Elena trapped me. They knew Brennan still lived and they wanted me to tell them where he was ..."

"Tortured you, did they?" Thady said with a shake of his head. "Monsters!"

"Kalamar ... made me believe I was going to die, but something inside me would not let go. Perhaps it was watching my old harp turned into ashes in Kalamar's hands. I'd had it since I was a child, and it meant all the world to me. Kalamar burned it, and in my anger I remembered the magic Rhystar taught me. They could destroy my harp, but they could not stop my Songs."

"I sang the Gate Song and escaped to the place where my father and Brennan waited. I healed myself, although ..." Anwyn bit his lip. The pain inside had not gone away with the healing of his flesh. He touched the strings and continued.

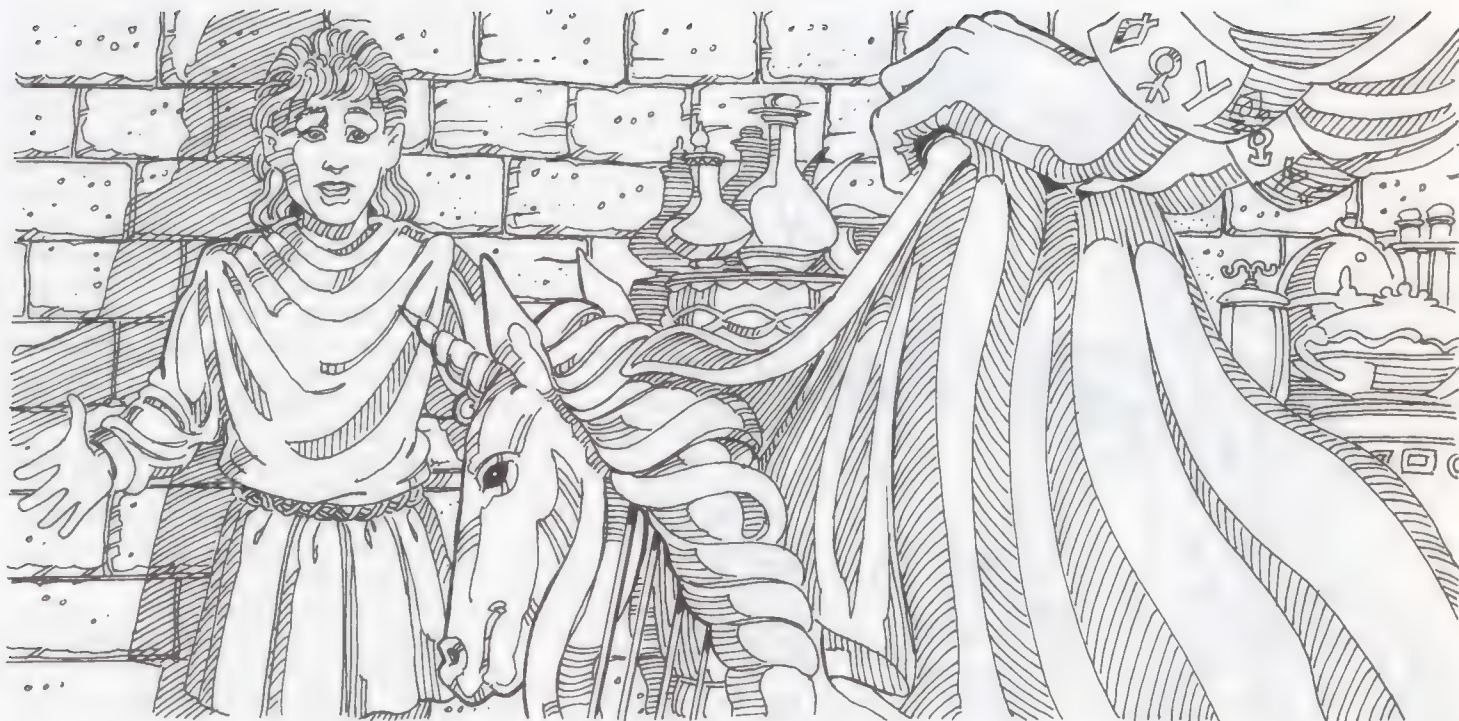
"Kalamar followed me to Thryst, and threatened everyone's lives. Brennan went out to meet the fiend's challenge, but he didn't have a chance. I was so afraid, but I sang forth a sphere of water to surround Kalamar. He ranted against me as I held the Song, and I could feel his power growing stronger, and didn't know how long I could last."

"Brennan must have realized this. He bargained with Kalamar, and offered to free the wraith if he would leave us alone. Kalamar agreed, and swore all he really wanted was to be free of Elena. He promised to assist us in exchange for his heartstone, so I let him go. But afterwards, I learned Kalamar had killed my youngest sister Thala while seeking me."

"Now that's a sad thing," Thady said, looking mournful.

"I vowed revenge," Anwyn said. "I went back to Far Reach, in spite of the fact that Brennan thought Rhystar was using me. That didn't matter to me. If Rhystar had asked for the moon in exchange for his help, I would have taken it to him. But he didn't. He asked that I bring Kalamar's heartstone to him to destroy. And then, he offered me a wonderful gift ..."

The long, dark passage ended at a wall. Rhystar motioned and spoke a



command under his breath. The wall melted, leaving an archway that opened into a chamber lit by indeterminable means. It took Anwyn only a moment to realize the glow was emanating from many of the items in the room.

Rhystar waved his hand, and torches burst into flames, filling the room with a red-gold glow. Anwyn held his breath in awe. The chamber held a multitude of treasures of a like he had never seen. There were bottles and urns, statuary and caskets. One table overflowed with scrolls that also filled many shelves. Another was piled above his head with books. Large urns held staves and wands in bundles.

"What is all this?" Anwyn asked.

"When one learns the arts, one manages to squirrel away many items of use to that craft," Rhystar said. "Some of these things, I created myself. Others, have I collected in my early travels — inherited from my teacher — or stolen from others of my kind."

"Stolen?"

"Not in the usual sense," Rhystar said with a smile. "Long ago, when the world was full of mages like myself, battles for power were not uncommon. The victor usually walked away with the spoils, if he or she was able to walk away at all."

"What do you do with all this stuff?" Anwyn asked.

"Very little," Rhystar said and shook his head. "After nearly a thousand years, many of these precious items

have lost their original attraction."

"They're no longer useful?"

"Oh, no," Rhystar said. "There are some potentially dangerous items here. Perhaps, I should say, I get bored with them."

Anwyn felt the urge to withdraw from the room as he cast about at the items, wondering which ones were the most dangerous.

"Come," the mage said, taking Anwyn's arm and leading the youth deeper into the maze of piles littering the chamber. The place must have been huge! Anwyn stayed close to the mage and suppressed the desire to touch anything. What if he started some magical holocaust from which there was no escape? Rhystar seemed undisturbed by anything in the room. He made his way to a free-standing table covered with a velvet cloth. A muffled shape sat in the center of the table. Rhystar motioned for Anwyn to stop, and he needed no encouragement. He wrapped his arms about himself as an icy chill trickled down his spine. He could feel something he didn't understand here, and it frightened him.

Reverently, Rhystar lifted the covering from the shape. Anwyn held his breath. Under the cloth was a harp, but it was like none he had ever seen. Carved from white wood, the strings appeared to be pure gold. The sounding board bore almond-shaped holes. Intertwining lines were etched into the base of the pillar. The neck curved gen-

tly forward from the top of the soundbox, terminating in the intricately carved head of a unicorn, chin tucked to chest. A gilded horn spiraled from its brow. The wooden mane had been carved so that it fell forward as though the creature were frozen at the moment it had finished tossing its head. Anwyn stepped closer. The eyes of the unicorn were closed.

"It's beautiful!" he said, whispering his admiration for the workmanship.

"It belonged to Colyn," Rhystar said, with a hint of wistful remorse. "I made this for him before he died."

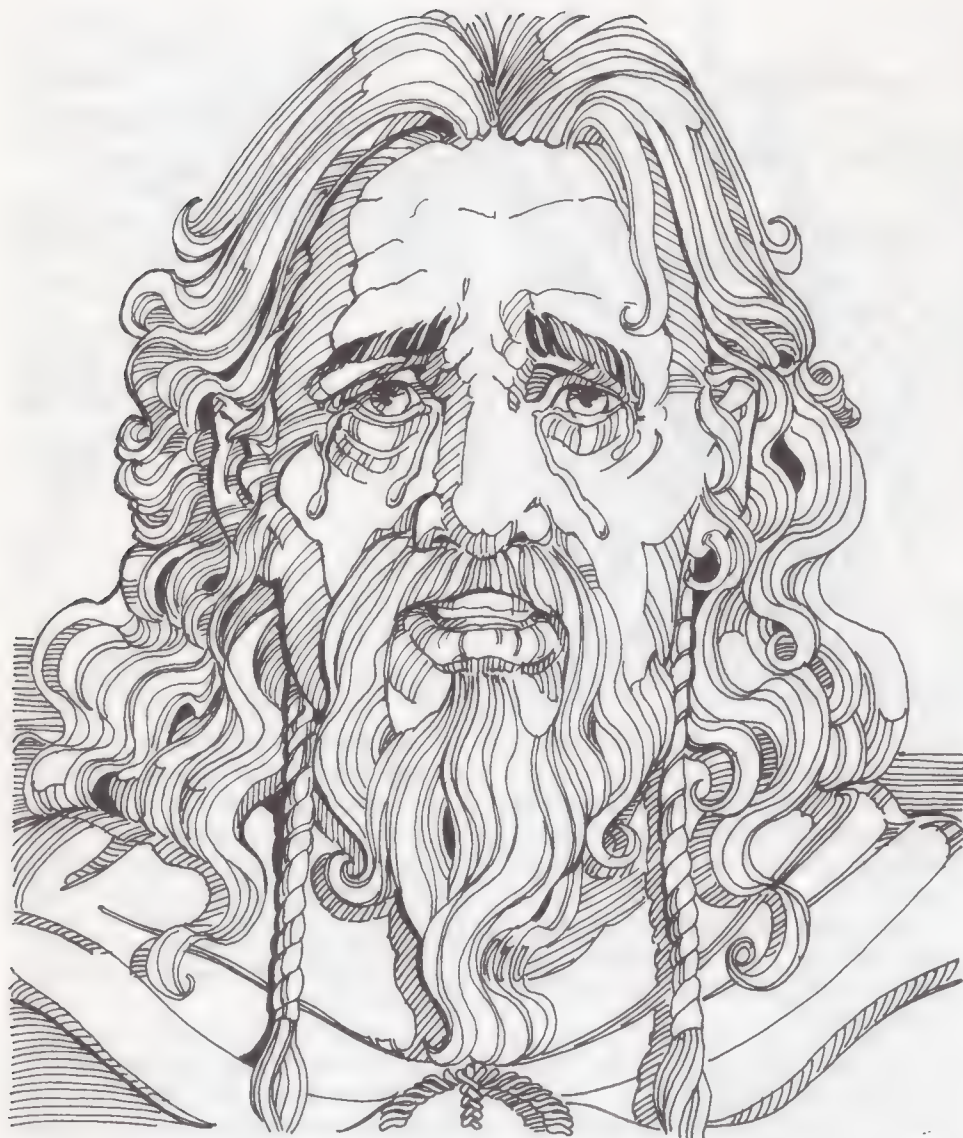
"How does it sound?" Anwyn asked.

"Sweeter than any mortal-made harp you have ever known. Colyn could make it sing in a most unearthly manner at times. Those strings have known no other touch since his death. Go on. Take it. Let us see how well you can make it sing."

Anwyn's hands trembled as he approached the table. He reached for the harp, barely brushing the smooth wooden surface of its nose. Static crackled lightly over his skin. He grasped the pillar, when the eyes of the unicorn opened and fixed him with a sapphire stare.

"Well, it's about time!" an irritated voice rang like a bell through Anwyn's head. He flinched, withdrawing his touch and swiftly backed away, only to stop when he bumped into the mage.

"It's ... alive!" Anwyn cried and turned his back on the beautiful cre-



ation to stare up at Rhystar.

"You've got yourself a bright one there, Rhystar," the voice said in a mocking manner.

Rhystar glowered in the direction of the harp before turning a kinder stare on the harper. "Anwyn," he said in a low voice. Firm hands took Anwyn's shoulders and chided him with a gentle shake. "Like it or not, you are mageborn. You have no reason to be frightened of the instrument. It's only a harp — an insolent one, but a harp all the same. Besides, you cannot fear magic if you are going to visit me. And you cannot play music for me without a harp. We made a bargain, remember?"

Slowly, Anwyn nodded, turning again to face the harp.

"Its name is Glynnanis," Rhystar said. "And yes, it is very much alive. It contains the soul of the last living uni-

corn."

"Glynnanis," Anwyn repeated with a waiver in his voice.

He took a deep breath. *What AM I afraid of? It was only a harp. But it's alive!* He edged back towards, pausing a few feet away, hesitant under the alien stare of those gem eyes. His hand trembled when he grasped the white wood.

"Go ahead and pick me up, harper," the voice sang inside Anwyn's head. "I promise I won't bite too hard."

"Glynnanis, behave yourself," Rhystar scolded. "Or I'll put the blanket back and find a less rude harp for Anwyn to play."

"Anwyn? Isn't that a Thuathyn name?"

"Yes," Anwyn said.

"Well, go on, Anwyn. Take me. I promise I'll behave. Anything to get out of this place again."

Gently, Anwyn took the harp into his

arms, fearing it would be offended by too firm a grasp. Seating himself on the table, he rested the soundbox against his shoulder. A living warmth seeped through his tunic, shirt and trews as he sat the harp on his knees. It was as though he were holding another creature and not an instrument. He shivered as the touch awakened some center in him, calling to a part of him he would just as soon deny. This was magic, and there was nothing to fear from its caress.

"Go on," Rhystar said. "Play something, Anwyn."

Anwyn nodded, still watching the harp. The unicorn angled its head to gaze back at him in an expectant manner. "Well?" it sang to him. "What are you waiting for?"

"Glynnanis!" Rhystar said.

"Okay, so a few hundred years of solitude has made me a little irritable!"

"We could try for a thousand," Rhystar retorted.

Anwyn decided it best to ignore both of them. He took a deep breath and stroked the strings to see if they needed tuning.

The sound that graced his ears was beyond anything he had ever coaxed from his old harp — beyond music itself. It rang deep inside Anwyn, vibrating his soul with a shiver of pleasure. He closed his eyes and played a melody from memory, a song composed in a moment of sorrow. An air of mournful despair filled the chamber, and his own heart was breaking as he recalled the feelings that inspired the tune. Yet a certain detachment came over him as he played, allowing him to continue without being moved to tears.

It was then that Anwyn heard the sobs, not his own, and when he opened his eyes, Rhystar was crying.

"Rhystar," Anwyn said. "I'm sorry!" He slipped off the table, touching the strings to silence.

The mage merely shook his head, drying his eyes on a sleeve. His cheeks reddened somewhat from embarrassment as he grinned. "No, Anwyn," he said. "Please don't stop on my account. That was beautiful. Colyn would have been so envious."

"A fine gift," Thady said with a lopsided smile. Apparently, the mead was going to his head. "A clever tale too. You've got a talent, lad."

"It doesn't surprise you to learn the harp has a voice that only those born to

magic can hear?" Anwyn said, plucking a note or two from the golden strings and eyeing his host.

"Oh, come on, lad," Thady said. "It's just a tale, after all, isn't it?"

"Well, no," Anwyn said, unable to hide his disappointment. "It's all true."

"Oh, aye," Thady said, waving his mug and winking. "I think you've had a little too much to drink."

Nowhere near as much as you, I imagine, Anwyn thought.

"Not that it wasn't a fine tale, lad, but after all, that's what you do for a living," Thady continued. "I dare say you'll get a fat lot of coin telling that one in some baron's court. But if I was you, I'd leave out all the part about loving a man. Only the ladies will enjoy that. Oh, and add a few battles to make it more exciting."

Thady pulled himself out of his chair only to stumble back in the seat. His eyes blinked blearily.

"Dear me," he said. "I'm feeling a bit tired just now, lad. Go help yourself to a room. I think I'll go to bed now. Thank ye for the tale. Best I've heard all winter."

Drawing more cautiously out of the chair, Thady staggered towards the back of the inn and through a door. The

echo of its closing left a vibration on Anwyn's ears. The harper stayed where he was, looking uncertain.

"Don't worry about him," Glynnanis sang, and the harp angled its head to look back at Anwyn's grim frown. "I liked your tale just fine. Let's go see if he has a nice room upstairs, and you can tell it to me again."

Anwyn sighed, rising from the chair. Why were winter nights so very long? *

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Results of the Cauldron

Stories:

- 1st Place: **"Shadders"**
by Carrie Martin
- 2nd Place: **"Gryphon Rider"**
by Cherith Baldry and
"Steelwing" by Connie Wilkins
- 3rd Place: **"Well Met by Moonlight"**
by Marion Zimmer Bradley

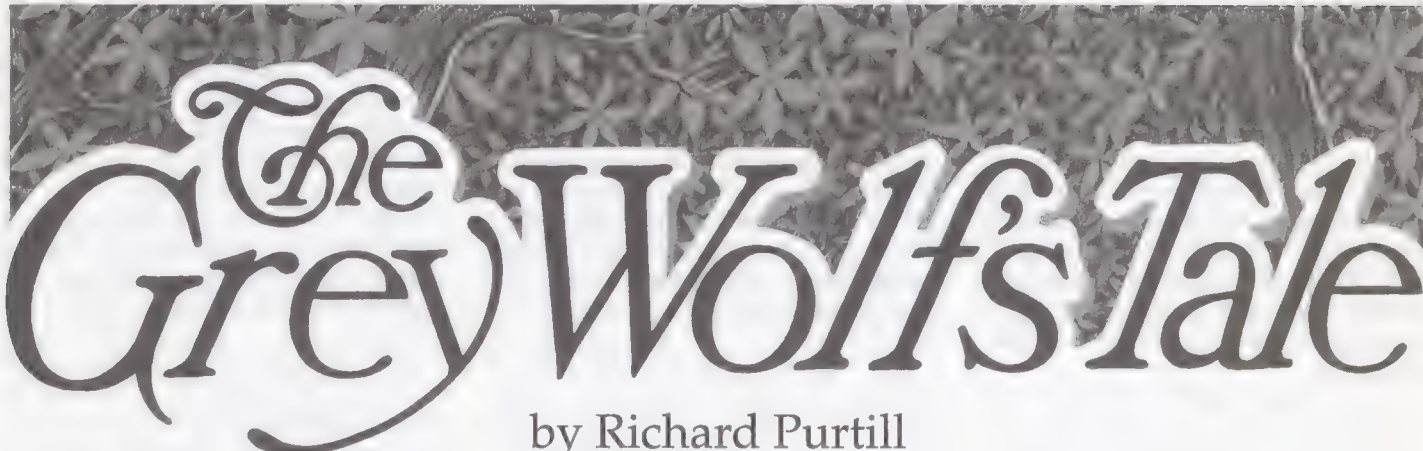
Artwork:

- 1st Place: **Alicia Austin**
for **"Tiger, Tiger"**
- 2nd Place: **Carl Lundgren**
for the cover artwork
- 3rd Place: **George Barr**
for **"Well Met By Moonlight"**

The Cauldron ballot is on page 64 - vote for your favorites. (A photocopy is okay if you don't want to cut up your copy of the magazine; please, only one ballot per reader.)



Artwork by George Barr



The Grey Wolf's Tale

by Richard Purtill

Nu, what's a poor wolf to do? Trying to make a living on the steppes of Rus is a hard job. The prey is scarce and wily and keeping body and soul together gets harder and harder as you get older. (All that grey in my pelt is more the result of age than of my species.) So if Baba Yaga offers you a steady job how can you refuse? The job looked easy. There's a crossroads where three paths branch off from one path. There are signs that say "Take this path and both you and your horse will die," "Take this path and your horse will live but you will die," and "Take this path and your horse will die but you will live."

What does that mean? How many knights or heroes are going to take the path where he and his horse will die? And how many are so fond of their horses that they'll choose the path where the horses live and they die? I'll tell you: *nikevo* — no one. So all you have to do is guard the path where the horse will die and the rider will live. Then, after lulling the rider into a false sense of security, you leap out of the bushes and kill the horse.

Supposedly, you have to keep an eye on the other paths but it's a waste of time: everyone will choose the path that sacrifices the horse. If no one comes for a while, Baba Yaga will give you some meat to get by on. I don't ask what the meat is, but knowing Baba Yaga's habits, believe me, I don't want to know. On the other hand, if someone comes down the third path, the horse is all yours. Look, there's good eating on a horse.

So one day I was lurking near the path and this kid came up riding a horse. From one look at him I could tell that he was the youngest of three brothers. Being the youngest of three brothers is not always easy, but in matters of

magic it does give you the advantage. He dithered about a little, but eventually he took the path that meant death for his horse and a meal for me. I always like it when they hesitate to take that trail: it shows a little respect for their horse and maybe for animals in general. Not always — one knight who was really fond of his horse got me with his spear as I ran away after killing his horse, and it took me a while to recover.

Well, this one was easy. I darted in, slashed at the horse's throat, and was ready to run for the bushes if the kid showed any signs of resistance. But instead of attacking me, the kid knelt down by the body of the horse and started to cry. Look, I'm not all that hardhearted; I think humans are almost as sensitive as wolves. After all, some humans can change into wolves, but did you ever hear of a werehorse?

"Look, kid," I said to him, "it's nothing personal. It's my job to kill horses on this trail." He gazed up at me tearfully. "I'm Prince Ivan," he said. "I have to find the Firebird. I thought I was so clever not letting myself fall asleep in my father's garden. He wanted to know who was stealing all the best fruit from his trees. I almost caught the Firebird then; I caught a feather from his tail. But as soon as my father saw the feather, he wanted the Firebird itself. So he sent my two brothers off for it — the very ones who went to sleep on watch in the garden. I had to beg and plead before he'd let me go after the Firebird. Now without a horse how can I get across the thrice-nine kingdoms to get to the thrice-ten kingdom where the Firebird lives?"

I gave a sigh. "Look, kid, stop your crying," I said. "I'll carry you to the kingdom where the Firebird nests. All you have to do is follow my directions

and you'll soon be on your way back to your father with the Firebird." If I'd only known how much trouble the kid was going to be for me, I would never have made the offer.

Well, he stopped crying and mounted on my back. Frankly, I don't understand "thrice-nine lands" and "thrice-ten lands." Maybe it means leagues or *virsts* or whatever measure they use. If some place is 27 leagues from your own country's borders it's far away, but not too far away; while if it's over 30 leagues away it's really far away by their standards. But anyway, I know where the Firebird nests; so long as you're reasonably sensitive to magic, you know where a being like the One True Phoenix lives.

So presently we arrived at the place where the Firebird nests: it was at the palace of the Tsar Afron. I know that the Tsar would be just as glad to get rid of the Firebird. A Phoenix is very hard on any fruit trees nearby, as well as requiring constant praise: none of the Magical Animals is as vain as a Phoenix. "Now look, kid," I said to him. "You'll find the Firebird in one of the trees in the Tsar's garden. There's a golden cage nearby, but *don't touch the cage!* The Firebird will come with you if you keep praising it and keep on describing the fruit in your father's garden. Frankly, the bird is greedy as well as vain and all you have to do is convince him that he ought to come with you voluntarily. As soon as you try to put him in the cage, he'll give the alarm."

So the kid went off; but did he listen to me? No, he got worried that the bird would fly off and put the Firebird in the cage. So when he finally came back to me, not only did he not have the Firebird, but he had promised the Tsar Afron that he would steal the horse

with the golden mane from Tsar Kusman. Actually, the Tsar told him that if he had come and asked him nicely, he would have given him the bird. And the kid just couldn't give up because the Tsar promised to spread it around that Prince Ivan was a thief, and had been caught trying to steal from the Tsar Afron. That was pretty good thinking on the part of the Tsar, since no nobleman, much less a prince, wants to have that kind of talk going on about him.

I'm not sure that Tsar Afron would have done it, even if Ivan hadn't gotten the horse for him, but it was enough to send the kid into the depths of depression. "All right, kid," I said. "I'll help you one more time. I know the meadow where the horse with the golden mane grazes. It's not far from here; climb on and I'll take you there." When we got near the place where the horse with the golden mane grazed, I looked the kid straight in the eye. "Now listen up, kid," I said. "There's a golden bridle hanging on a tree near the horse. *Don't touch the bridle!* If you try to put the bridle on the horse, it will give the alarm to Tsar Kusman, whose meadow this is. If, on the other hand, you keep praising its beautiful golden mane, and keep describing how the horse will be admired if he comes with you to your father's kingdom, it will carry you without any bridle. All you have to do is tell him where to go. All right, go and convince the horse."

Nu, so you know what happened already, right? The kid got worried that the horse would run away and tried to put the bridle on the horse. So when he came back it was the same story as Tsar Afron; if he didn't bring back the fair Yelena for the Tsar Kusman to marry, he'd spread the news that Ivan was a thief. If, on the other hand, Ivan brought the fair Yelena back, the Tsar Kusman would give him the horse, which he could trade for the Firebird, and his mission would be a success.

"Look, kid," I said. "I'm through giving advice. I'll take you to the kingdom where the fair Yelena's father is Tsar. Once I take you there *you're on your own!* I don't owe you anything and I'll take no further interest in what happens to you. Is it a deal?"

The kid agreed and I took him to Tsar Dalmat's palace. "She's someplace in the garden," I said and walked away from him, not looking back. Of course I only went to the next bit of cover; I

wanted to know what happened just as much as you do. And what do you know? Within half a candle's length he was back with the fair Yelena! I hadn't even told him not to tie her up with the golden rope which was hanging nearby; he hadn't even noticed it. So catch me giving advice again. Maybe if I hadn't mentioned the golden cage or the golden bridle, he wouldn't have noticed them! Or maybe he was just contrary?

Now the fair Yelena was quite a woman. As soon as I poked my nose out of the thicket I was hiding in to look at them, she came over to pet and praise me. "Grey Wolf, Grey Wolf," she said, "Ivan and I owe you so much! I know you said you wouldn't do anything more for Ivan, but for my sake would you carry us both to Tsar Kusman's kingdom?"

Look, with that kind of line a beautiful woman can do anything with me. I carried them back to Tsar Kusman's kingdom and, believe me, the fair Yelena was no lightweight. She was a real Russian beauty, but she was tall and had dancer's muscles. When we got there, the fair Yelena began crying. Believe me, that woman knew how to cry without spoiling a bit of her beauty. "Grey Wolf, Grey Wolf," she said, "I don't want to marry an old man like the Tsar Kusman. Can't we get the horse with the golden mane without trading me for it?"

I told her exactly what I had told Ivan, but she *listened!* She was off, telling Ivan to take it easy after his great exertions and within half a candle's length she was back, riding the horse with the golden mane. She was praising it and telling it what a wonderful horse it was, but I wasn't jealous because I felt that the fair Yelena really meant what she said. She praised me for my strength and cunning, and she praised the horse for its strength and dexterity, as well as its wonderful golden mane.

She put Ivan on the horse with the golden mane and rode me to the Tsar Afron's palace. "Grey Wolf, Grey Wolf," she said, "how can we give our new friend, the horse with the golden mane, to a blackmailer like Tsar Afron? Is there any way we can get the Firebird without giving up the horse?" I told her the same thing that I had told Ivan, but she *listened!* Within half a candle's length she was back with the bird on her shoulder, praising him for his

beauty and cleverness. She asked me to carry her until we reached the triple crossroads while Ivan rode the horse and of course I agreed.

At the crossroads, she looked at Ivan. "Are you prepared to marry me and take care of me?" she asked.

"Well," said Ivan, "I like you very much, fair Yelena, but the fact is, I'm Princess Maria, disguised as a boy, and I really can't marry you and take care of you."

The fair Yelena grinned. "You think that's news to me?" she said. "Go on, take the Firebird to your father and tell him never to underestimate his daughter. But if you encounter your brothers, don't trust them. They'd gladly steal the Firebird from you and claim the credit."

Ivan — that is, Princess Maria — tossed her head and said, "As if I couldn't always run rings around both of them. But what if the Tsars Afron and Kusman spread the story that I'm a thief?"

"Don't worry," said the fair Yelena. "In the first place, there isn't any 'Prince Ivan'; that was just a name you used. And if word gets back to them that a young princess stole their Firebird and horse they'll be ashamed to complain because you fooled them so completely."

"All right," said Princess Maria. "But what will you do, fair Yelena?"

"Don't worry about me," said the fair Yelena. "The wolf and I will work something out." When Princess Maria had gone off carrying the Firebird, the fair Yelena turned to me and asked, "Are you a werewolf?"

"Well, yes," I said "but I haven't Changed for a long time. It's easier for a wolf to make a living on the steppes than a man."

"May I see your human form?" she asked.

I Changed and looked at her. "As you can see," I said, "I'm not as young as I used to be."

She kissed me and said, "If you're a real princess you can always tell the real hero of the tale."



RICHARD PURTILL is a professor of philosophy at Western Washington University in Bellingham, WA. He has written three fantasy novels, an SF novel, and a mystery, as well as many short stories of fantasy, science fiction, and mystery.

GEORGE BARR has been a professional artist since 1960.

Marion Zimmer Bradley's FANTASY Magazine

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- ___ #3 (Winter 1989) *The Adinkra Cloth* (a Nebula finalist!) - Mary C. Aldridge.
- ___ #5 (Summer 1989) - "The Dragon Issue" *The Dragon, the Unicorn and the Teddy Bear* - Phyllis Ann Carr.
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- ___ #14 (Fall 1991) - *Black Ribbon* - Dawn Albright; cover by Gail Butler. *The Tengu's Scroll* - Dana Kramer-Rolls.
The Wuzzles - M. Z. Bradley.
- ___ #16 (Spring-Summer 1992) - *Never Look at a Gift Sword in the Horse's Mouth* - Jennifer Roberson;
cover by Alan Gutierrez.
- ___ #18 (Winter 1992) - *Arakney's Web* - Jo Clayton; cover by Nick Jainschigg. *The Black Tower* - Laura Underwood.
Queeneyes - eluki bes shahar.
- ___ #20 (Summer 1993) - *Cannibal Sorcerer* - Evangeline Walton & Bruce D. Arthurs. *Maiden, Are You Warm?* - Isabel Cole.
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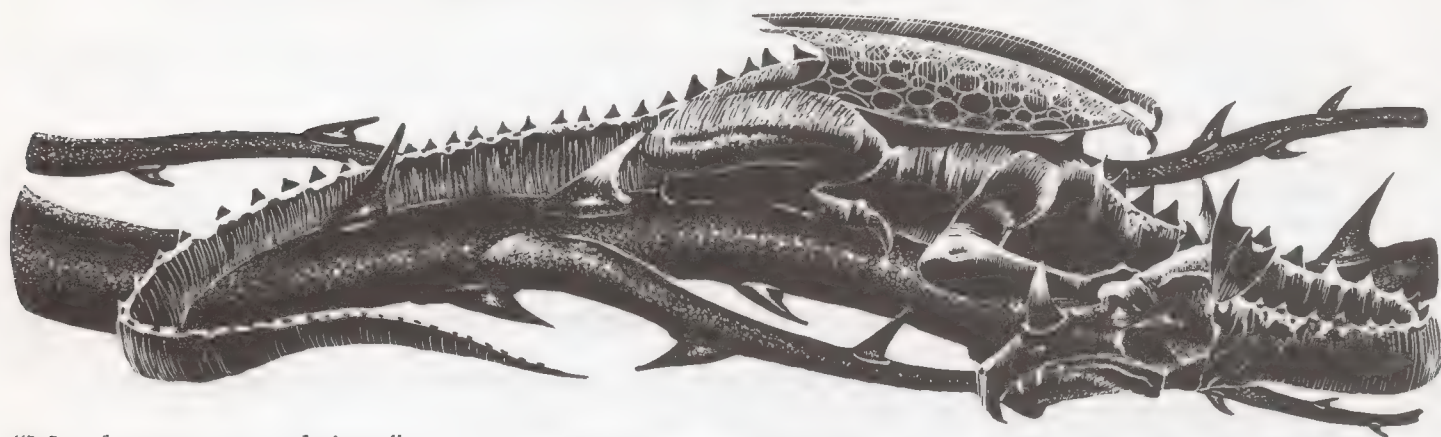
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Dragons, Domestiques et Sauvages

by Patricia Russo



"My dragons are dying," said the duc de Bèze.

There are many things one might reasonably expect a duc to say. This wasn't one of them. I cast about for a response, and drew an utter blank. Thibault poked me viciously in the spine.

"I am desolate, Your Grace," I managed.

"You're desolate. How do you think I feel?"

Wadding up my letter of introduction, the duc turned toward the fireplace, as if to hurl it into the flames. I clenched my teeth. I'd labored over that letter for weeks. The forgery was perfect, down to the wax I used for the seal. Down to the *seal*.

His Grace was a short, stringy, yellowish man who had not aged well. I doubted he'd been handsome even as a youth. In old age, his fringe of dirty white hair, his bald dome speckled with liverish spots, and his sunken cheeks gave him the aspect of a vile-tempered scavenger bird. Shoulders hunched, he scrutinized the letter once more.

"Your brother thinks highly of you."

I lowered my eyes humbly. My brother Jérôme would cheerfully see me dead. If he ever came to know I'd used his name for such a purpose — never mind counterfeiting his seal — he'd murder me himself.

I probably shouldn't have written it, but I was getting desperate. It had been more than two years since I'd held a position worthy of my rank and education. Thibault and I had managed to keep ourselves alive, but nothing more. I was tired of a hand-to-mouth existence. I wanted a real life.

"A Master of Arts," the duc murmured. "A student of the natural sciences and of mathematics."

"Yes, Your Grace."

"You come from a good family," he said, as if it were hard to believe. Given the travel-worn and excessively patched state of my attire, it was difficult to take offense.

"I have that honor."

He looked me up and down, and sniffed.

Oh please, I thought. Oh please, please, please. The old man was obviously dotty, but I could live with that. Even the fact that his estate consisted of a tiny castle, a handful of doddering servants, and a few acres of land so far up the Vosges mountains I had the sneaking suspicion we'd crossed into Switzerland somewhere en route couldn't dampen my enthusiasm. A position in a duc's household would be a big step up from what I'd been doing.

"If Your Grace would care to accept a sample of my work, I would be most

honored to draw up an astrological calendar —" He narrowed his eyes, and I started to stutter. "Or — or — or perhaps a demonstration of the sublimation of a solid substance to a gas?" That would be hard to do with neither chemicals or equipment, but I was desperate to impress him. "I can read Greek," I blurted.

"What do you know about dragons?"

Not a single solitary thing. "I've read about them, Your Grace. I've read ..." I wracked my memory for the name of a text or two, and couldn't come up with one. "Lots. I've read a whole lot about them." His Grace glared at me. A trickle of sweat snaked down my back. Humor him, I told myself. "If I may be so bold, how is it Your Grace has the happiness to possess dragons? Where do they come from?"

"Where do they come from? Where do they come from?" His face empurpling, he shouted, "Where do you *think* dragons come from?"

I thought rapidly. "Cathay?"

"Humph." He tapped the forged letter with a yellow fingernail. "I suppose you might as well come along and see them."

"As Your Grace desires." Bowing, I caught a glimpse of Thibault rolling his eyes.

A spasm of pure rage shot through me. Didn't the brainless idiot realize what was at stake here? The duc was of an older generation. He would not understand laxity between master and servant as anything but presumptuousness on Thibault's part, and an utter failure of character on mine.

The duc, muttering to himself, walked to the door. I caught Thibault's arm as he turned to bring up the rear. "None of that," I hissed. I squeezed his arm hard, and he winced, more out of surprise than pain, I imagined. "Absolutely none of that. Do you understand me?"

Thibault's broad Breton face went studiously blank. "Yes."

"Yes, what?" I gripped him more tightly, deliberately hurting him now. He had to understand I was serious.

"Yes, Magister Jouffroi," he said, his voice expressionless.

"Mon dieu. They *are* dragons," Thibault said in a choked voice.

I don't know how he was able to tell. The creatures, roughly the size and shape of scrawny, featherless chickens, looked like nothing so much as abnormally large and deformed lizards unaccountably gifted with grey-green leathery wings. His Grace had them penned in an enclosure between the kitchen gardens and the castle's outer wall. The dragons — dragonlets, I supposed — huddled together in some dirty straw heaped up in the far corner. From the smell of the thing, the pen had recently been used as a pigsty.

"They can't fly yet, of course," the duc said, his chest swelling with what I could only think was pride. "When they get a little older I'll have some sort of coop constructed."

Dragons. The old fool actually had dragons in his castle yard. I searched for something to say.

"Wouldn't they be better off indoors?"

"Can't have them in the castle. The smell, you know." And, indeed, even with a mild breeze blowing, the aroma of the dragonlets hung heavily in the air, a stink something not quite like that of rotting meat mixed with the odor of dried snakeskin. "Can't have them in the stables. Terrify the horses. Tried them in the cowshed — they curdled the milk."

"How many of them are there?"

"There were six." His expression darkened. "But two died. Most extraordinary thing. Yesterday evening they were fine, and this morning I found them stone dead."

"Of what?"

"I don't know," the duc snapped. "I never raised dragons before. That's why I need someone to watch over the hatchlings. And the eggs, of course."

"Eggs?" I repeated, faintly.

"Eggs. Eggs." He pointed to another mound of quite filthy straw in the erstwhile pigpen. "Six eggs," he said, very carefully, as if to a lackwit. "I bought twelve, you see. Six have already hatched, and the others will soon."

Twelve dragons. Even minus the two who'd died, that was quite a flock.

Why? For pity's sake, *why*?

"My lord," Thibault said. I glared at him, but to my horror, he wasn't talking to me.

Too late. The duc had turned around.

"Your Grace," I hissed.

"Your Grace," Thibault repeated smoothly. "It's too cold here for dragons."

The duc gaped at Thibault. It was as

if one of the sparrows scavenging in the kitchen garden had suddenly raised its head and spoken in a human voice. "Humph," the duc said, gathering himself. "Nonsense, boy. Nonsense. Very fiery creatures, dragons. Brisk air won't harm them."

Thibault, who apparently was bent on ruining any chance I had to be offered the position, said, "They don't belong here."

"Extraordinary," the duc murmured. He looked at me, and I felt myself shrink like a snail sprinkled with salt.

"Well," he said, after a moment. "What do you say, then?"

It took an instant for the meaning of his words to sink in. "Oh, Your Grace, I can't begin to convey how deeply, deeply honored —"

"Yes, yes." He waved my words off impatiently. "Just take care of my dragons."

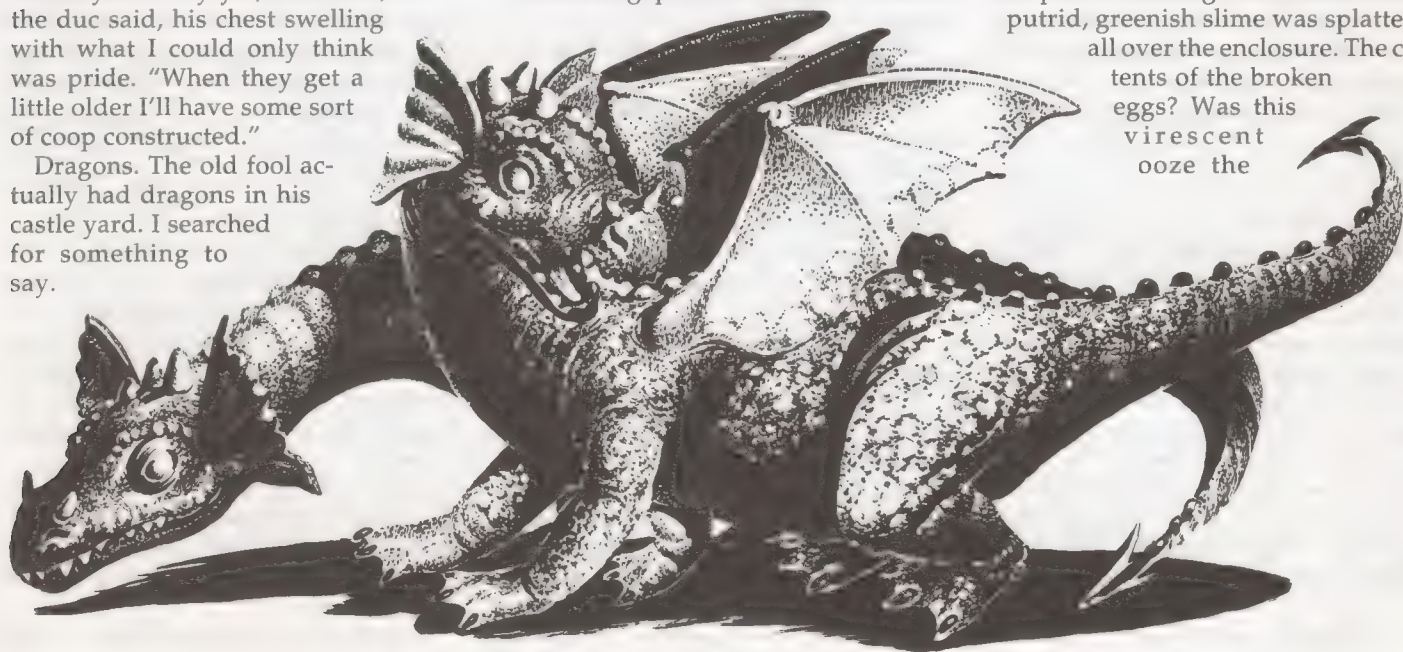
"Your Grace may rely on me," I said, with all the confidence I could muster.

The next morning, when we discovered all six eggs smashed, and the four surviving dragonlets trembling and mewling like terrified kittens, I nearly died.

The duc de Bèze turned the most alarming shade of puce and let out a roar that must've been heard in Switzerland, if in truth we weren't in Switzerland already. One would not have imagined such a little, wizened old man capable of emitting such a sound.

Casually, as if it were the most normal thing in the world, Thibault vaulted the pen's chest-high bluestone wall. A putrid, greenish slime was splattered all over the enclosure. The contents of the broken

eggs? Was this
virescent
ooze the



dragon equivalent of yolk? Scraps of some limp, gray material, which I deduced were the remnants of the shells, littered the straw.

The duc let out a startled exclamation.

I was too miserable to say a word. Every hope and dream, ambition or aspiration I ever held in my worthless failure of a life was about to evaporate like night mist at sunrise.

It was totally unfair. This wasn't my fault.

Thibault crouched beside the sodden heap of straw. "Smashed," he said. "Deliberately. The eggs were stamped on."

The duc gasped as though he'd been slapped. "Stamped on? Stamped on? By feet?"

"By something." Thibault paused. "Something big."

The duc threw his head back and let out a stream of invective that was truly a wonder to bear. Thibault had the effrontery to grin, though he quickly turned his head to conceal this from His Grace.

The duc grabbed me by the collar and shook me. "I have many enemies!" "Yes, Your Grace," I gasped.

He began to enumerate said enemies, denouncing quite an assortment of people as congenital villains, but it soon emerged that the duc's prime suspect was a certain Comte Mercoeur, who had the happiness to reside in the next valley but one. Apparently there'd been bad blood between the families of de Bèze and Mercoeur since the time of the duc and the comte's respective grand-pères. His Grace informed me darkly that the Comte was blessed with inordinately large feet.

"Big as soup tureens," he growled.

I tried to nod politely, but it was difficult as he still had me by the collar.

"Jealous. That's what he is. Always has been. I have dragons and he doesn't, and he just can't stand it. He killed those poor babies, too." Fury blazed in his eyes, and unthinkingly he tightened his grip on my clothing. "He won't be happy until they're all dead."

"That may be true," Thibault said. At that point I was unable to say much of anything. "Whoever broke the eggs may also have been responsible for the deaths of the two little dragons." He stood up. "If that's so, he may well return to kill the others."

So instead of spending that night in

my small but well-appointed room in the castle, with its canopied bed and fireplace and wall sconces and chest full of coverlets, I found myself with my derriere on the cold, cold ground, my back against an even colder blue-stone wall, mounds of vermin-infested straw piled over me as camouflage, and the duc's ancient and probably totally useless arquebus lying across my lap. It was nearly June, but we were quite high up in the mountains, and I could see my breath even before nightfall.

My bed in the castle had a feather mattress, and two plump pillows. Clean white sheets. Woolen blankets of exceptional fineness. All right, one or two were slightly moth-eaten, but they were still perfectly serviceable. I hadn't slept so comfortably in years as I had last night.

I hoped Thibault was suffering as much as I was. It was hard to tell, as he wouldn't talk to me.

Eventually the moon rose, its pale silver light making the night seem even colder. The longer we sat out there, the more my belief in the duc's vengeful big-footed neighbor waned. Probably one of the decrepit old servants had stepped on the eggs accidentally while lugging out the bucket of raw chopped meat that served as the little dragons' breakfast.

Thibault shifted his weight, making the straw rustle. He was armed with a stout stick, which in case of an emergency would probably prove much more utile than my arquebus.

"Shh," I said. "You're disturbing the fleas."

Nothing. Not even a grunt of acknowledgment.

Fine. But whether he liked it or not, our positions in life were different. It was all very well to treat each other in a relaxed manner when we were alone, or among people who didn't know the difference, but quite another for him to pretend we were equals in front of a duc.

"Talk to me," I said. "I'm falling asleep here."

"Is that an order, Magister Jouffroi?" I sighed between my teeth.

Some time later, when the night had lasted so long I'd begun to wonder if the sun would ever rise again, a terrible, literally breathtaking stink suddenly enveloped me, a choking miasma of putrefaction mingled with the tang of old, grimy ash. I gasped, which was

a serious mistake, then clapped my hands over my nose and mouth. It didn't help.

I looked at Thibault.

"Satan's armpit," he moaned, which was descriptive if nothing else.

The dragonlets, who had been so quiet the whole time I'd frightened myself more than once by wondering if the four of them had perversely picked the very night I was on watch to quietly perish en masse, burst into a torrent of screeches.

I scrambled up, sending straw flying everywhere. I remembered that I had forgotten about the arquebus on my lap when its heavy brass-bound butt thudded onto my toes. I said a very bad word. Thibault grabbed my arm and yanked me down.

"What?"

He babbled something that might have been a prayer.

Over the castle's outer wall rose a horrible shape — tremendous outstretched wings of no avian shape blotting out the sky, a monstrous black saurian body as long as five horses standing nose to tail.

"Mon dieu," I said.

The colossal creature made no sound. Even the sweeping beats of its gigantic wings were nearly silent. Each flap poured a cascade of stunning rankness over us. It rose higher, then fell back, sinking behind the castle wall, before struggling up again.

"He's old," Thibault said. I could barely hear him over the roaring in my ears.

With a mighty effort, the dragon reached the top of the wall. Grasping the stones with its taloned feet, it clung there like a monstrous, absurdly enormous gargoyle.

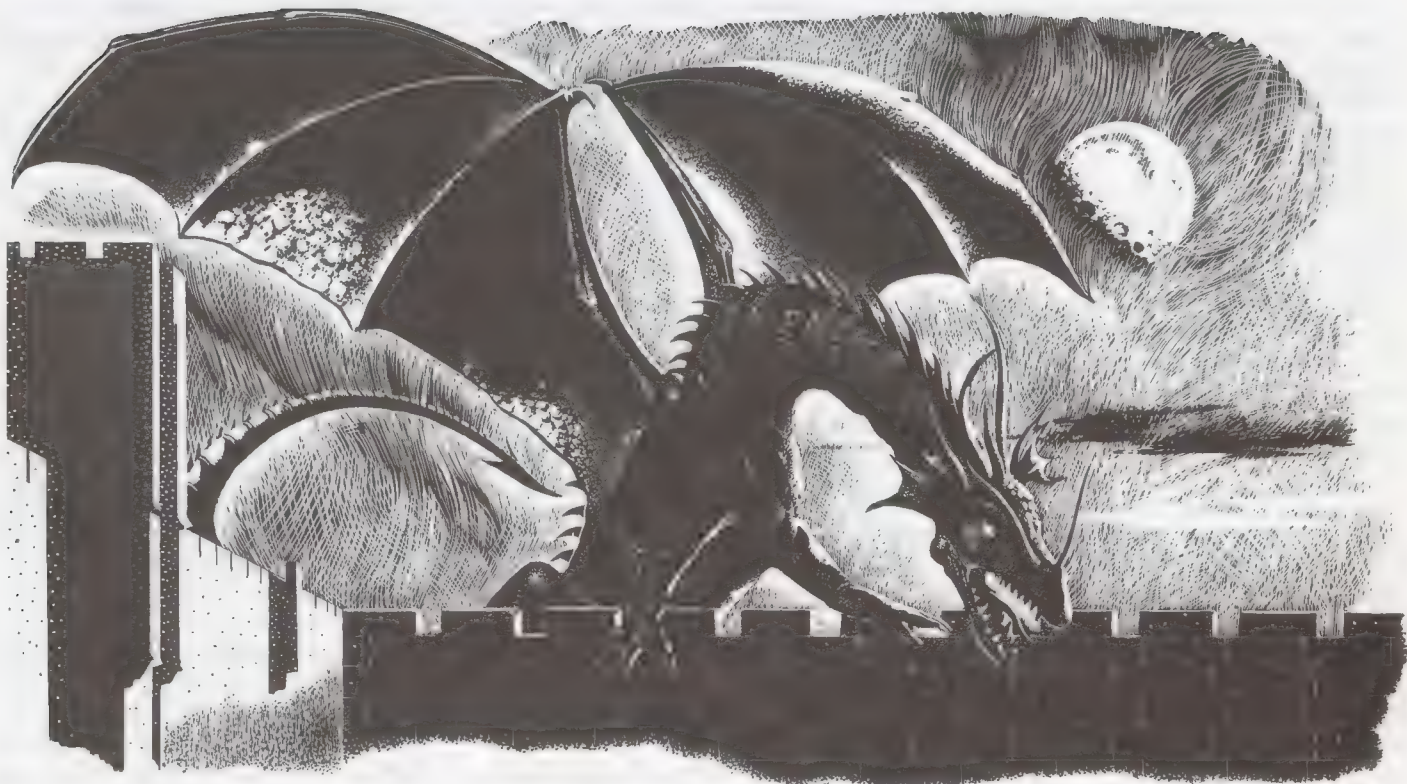
I thought my eyes were playing tricks. "Is it swaying?"

"He's swaying," Thibault said at almost the same instant.

We stared up at it in silence for some seconds. Then the realization of what would happen should the thing lose its grip and plunge from the wall struck us simultaneously. I beat Thibault out of the pen, but only because he stopped to grab the arquebus before vaulting the wall.

I never ran so fast in my life. I might have run until I was forcibly halted by the castle's east wall if Thibault hadn't overtaken me and screamed in my ear to turn around.

The dragon was descending.



The dragonlets shrieked.

The dragon, much too big to land inside the pen, hit the ground beside it heavily, and nearly toppled over. The moonlight silvered its back; its sides heaved as it panted, and I was afraid that the next minute its great jaws would gape open and spew forth a gush of sulphurous flame.

"Milk," I blurted.

"What?"

"Dragonfire can't be extinguished with water. You have to use milk." Not that there was any milk handy at the moment, but knowing that provided a modicum of comfort.

"He's old," Thibault repeated. "I don't think he's got much fire left."

"How do you know so much about dragons?"

"I don't," he said. "It's only common sense."

I didn't have overmuch faith in Thibault's common sense, but old, or ill, or injured the dragon certainly was. Later, I wondered if perhaps the creature hadn't simply been bone-weary. It was a long, long way from Cathay to France, and while the eggs the duc had purchased had traveled by caravan and cart and muleback, the dragon had traversed each league by the strength of its own wings.

Thibault may have been correct, though. Something more than exhaus-

tion was evident in the way the creature moved; it fought to raise a forelimb with the stiff determination of a rheumatic old man heaving himself out of a deep chair.

The dragon dipped its paw into the pen. Rumbling breathily, as if every movement cost it pain, it groped slowly around in the enclosure.

The dragonlets had gone silent.

The dragon gripped. It lifted its forelimb, and I glimpsed a dragonlet struggling in its grasp. Until the very instant when the dragon shook it viciously and snapped its neck, I thought it meant to rescue the captured brood.

Dropping the dead dragonlet into the pen, the dragon groped for another one.

"No!" I screamed. In a frenzy, I grabbed the arquebus out of Thibault's hands.

"Jouffroi, no!"

"It's killing them!"

I'd grabbed the barrel instead of the stock, and in my agitation I nearly dropped the weapon twice before I got the right end aimed at the dragon. The dragon was slaughtering the little ones, the hatchlings I was meant to keep alive.

Thibault snatched the weapon from me and hurled it as far as he could. Later, when I could review events calmly, I realized he'd probably saved my life. The thing was a hundred years

old if it was a day. Most likely it would have exploded in my face.

But I was certainly not calm then.

He must have read my expression, for he ran. I pelted after him, tackled him with perhaps more force than necessary, and sat on his head until he stopped fighting.

"Idiot! Cretin! How could you do that!"

Thibault shoved me off. "You'd have only made him mad, Jouffroi."

The dragon continued to rummage through the pen like an arthritic cat hunting a mouse in a chest. A grey, somehow grimy steam rose from its body in the chill night air. After a long search — I imagine the little dragons were doing their best to keep out of reach — it captured another, dispatching it like the first.

After it'd killed the second one, though, the dragon appeared spent. It laid its head down on its bent forelimbs and remained thus for quite a while, simply breathing and steaming. It seemed almost on the verge of sleep, but its eyes were open, red orbs lit by some dim inner flame.

I sunk my head in my hands and contemplated the imminent loss of my position. I imagined His Grace spreading the news of my incompetence far and wide throughout the land, destroy-

ing any chance of my ever obtaining another position in a noble household.

The dragon sighed loudly, and I jerked my head up. A ripple passed through its great bulk. Thibault tensed.

"What?"

He pointed to the sky. Looking up, I realized that more time had passed than I had thought. Dawn was not far off.

The dragon spread its wings, creakily, and beat the air slowly several times to no effect. I thought of a rock trying to fly, a massive boulder half buried in the soil of the mountain attempting to take to the air.

"He's not going to make it," Thibault whispered.

Even after it managed to rise off the ground, it could not stay aloft for more than a moment at a time, dropping back heavily to earth time and again. The sky continued to lighten, as skies just before dawn do, and I began to speculate on the duc's reaction to discovering a more-than-full-grown dragon occupying a considerable portion of his castle yard. Somehow I did not think he would be pleased.

Scrawny, mincemeat-eating dragonlets were one thing. This monstrous specimen of adult dragonhood was quite another.

Finally the dragon rose and remained aloft. The fetid odor of its body washed over us as it climbed. I held my breath until the dragon disappeared over the castle wall.

Thibault ran to the pen. I followed more slowly, my mind in a whirl. When I reached the enclosure, I found him kneeling in the muck, cradling the two surviving dragonlets in his arms.

I entered the duc's presence prepared to describe the events of the night in detail, casting all blame for the deaths of the two dragonlets exactly where it belonged. But when I told him two more of his purchases were dead, he went white with rage, and on seeing the small, stiffening bodies (I'd removed them from the pen and laid them out in the carriage yard), he let loose with such an unrelenting torrent of abuse I was unable to insert a word.

The worst part was that I was *not* culpable. Gritting my teeth, I tried to shut my ears to his tirade.

"And the other two?"

"Alive, Your Grace," I said tightly. "My man is with them."

"Ten gone," he screamed. "Ten out of twelve! Do you know how much that

clutch cost me? Do you know how long I had to search for those eggs? Do you think dragon eggs grow on trees, you feeble-minded, bow-legged, slack-jawed excuse for a scholar?"

"No, Your Grace," I murmured, but of course he wasn't listening.

In short, the interview was grim and most unfruitful. The bulk of it was conducted in the carriage yard, before the small corpses of my erstwhile charges, so I was spared having the servants privy to the depth of my disgrace. I did learn something, though. Not from the duc, but from the coat of arms above the entrance of the porte cochère.

Oh, my.

I should have known it was something like this.

Per fess azure a dragon couchant sable overall a thorn branch vert. It was not a very well-depicted dragon, rather horsey in outline in fact, with a pair of folded and quite unconvincing wings, and a ridiculously out of proportion head. But then I don't imagine the artist had the advantage of a live model to work from.

Vainglory. Vainglory plain and simple. It would please His Grace to have living heraldic symbols running about the castle yards. And that, for him, was sufficient cause to hire who knows how many people and spend who knows how much money to rob a nest in a country thousand of leagues away and transport the stolen eggs to his estate.

"What were you going to do when they got big?"

I'd interrupted a fusillade of obscenities; His Grace glared at me through slitted eyes.

"If they lived," I persisted. "If any of them lived, in this climate and on that raw mincemeat diet, which frankly I doubt, what would you have done?"

"Done? Done? Are you simple, man? Are you an idiot? Mounted them, of course."

Of course. Affixed their heads to the walls of his dining hall like hunting trophies, stretched their skins over the floors of his study, his bed chamber, his counting house ... No doubt the rugs would be scaly, but also no doubt they'd be impressive, which was the important thing.

"Well, you could always have these little ones stuffed," I said.

I'm afraid His Grace took me seriously, for his eyes lit up most alarmingly. Then a look of dismay spread

across his face. "I had the first two burned," he said, miserably. "The smell, you know."

I walked away from him, which was such a serious breach of etiquette he'd have been justified in sacking me on the spot. He might have already sacked me during the course of his diatribe. I wasn't sure. I'd stopped paying attention.

Thibault was playing with the dragonlets. You'd think someone who'd passed a long, cold, and sleepless night punctuated with moments of unadulterated terror could find a better way of spending his time than chasing two screeching, ill-coordinated winged reptiles around in the weeds between the garden and the pig pen.

"Get packed," I snapped. "We're leaving."

Thibault looked at me, pursed his lips, and said, "No."

The dragonlets, undoubtedly relieved he'd stopped chasing them, flopped down in the grass. The larger of the pair let out a serpentine hiss.

No. He'd said no.

"Not yet," he said. "Look." Suddenly, Thibault let out a loud scream and dashed toward the dragonlets, waving his arms over his head.

The little beasts squawked, bumped into each other, fell sprawling, squawked again, hissed, ran in lopsided circles like addled chickens, then abruptly and quite wonderfully took to the air. The smaller one rose first, flapping madly, but its sibling caught up within a moment. They flew low, and landed after only a handful of yards, but they flew.

Thibault looked at me with a strange exaltation. "If they can get over the wall they'll be all right. And I think, if I keep them at it, they'll be able to do it by tonight. It's the same as with birds, you see. They learn by doing."

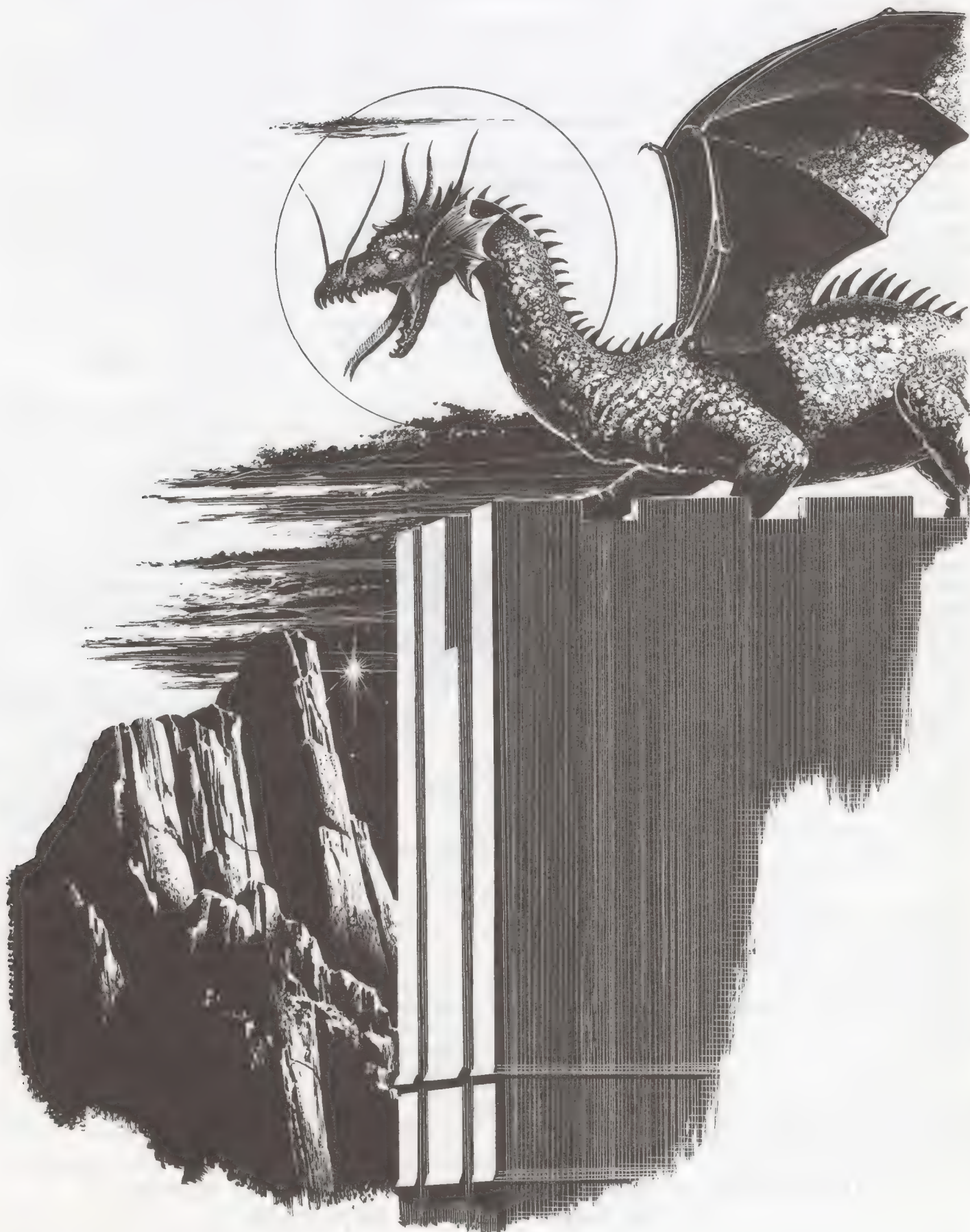
His face was aglow. Gently, I tried to dampen his ardor. "They'll not survive on their own, Thibault, even should they escape the castle. They're too young."

"They won't be on their own."

"Thibault. We can't take them with us."

He stared at me as if I were an idiot. I hate it when he does that. "Of course not. What would we do with dragons?"

Thibault dashed off for another lunge at the dragonlets, leaving me standing



Artwork by Vincent Di Fate

there, frankly baffled.

I went to pack, not that there was much to pack, every moment expecting to be summoned to the duc's presence for my formal dismissal. The summons never came. Perhaps His Grace was too busy arranging for the dead dragonlets to be stuffed.

The servants knew, though. They looked through me as through a pane of Venetian glass as I carried both my belongings and Thibault's through the lesser dining hall and the kitchens and out to the yards.

After three or four futile attempts to make Thibault see reason — if we left now, we'd have the best part of the day ahead of us to descend the mountain — I gave up. If Thibault wanted to waste the day chasing dragonlets, fine. It was not as if we had anything better to do. Too weary, and too dispirited, to assert myself, I stretched out in the weeds and pillowed my head on my satchel.

I awoke hours later, to cold and darkness and a pain in my neck that made my eyes water. Thibault was shaking me, none too gently.

"Shh," he said. "Shh. Look."

I didn't have to look to know that the big dragon was back; its heavy stench lay over me like a blanket. Oh, I thought, so that's why I'd been dreaming I was chained naked to a slime-dripping wall in the sewers of Paris.

Slime-dripping sewers or not, I wished Thibault hadn't wakened me for this. The dragon may have been old and exhausted, but the dragonlets' new-won aerial skills could only put off the inevitable for so long. In the end, it would kill them just as it had the others.

"He's on the wall," Thibault whispered.

So it was, as I determined when I could get my neck to bend enough to allow me to look up. Again the crouching figure, wings half-spread and talons locked on the top of the castle wall, put me forcibly in mind of a very oversized gargoye.

"Where are the little ones?"

"There. See?"

The dragonlets, like diminutive doubles of their persecutor, perched on the enclosure's bluestone wall, staring up at the big dragon. The larger one

abruptly let out a series of high-pitched squeaks.

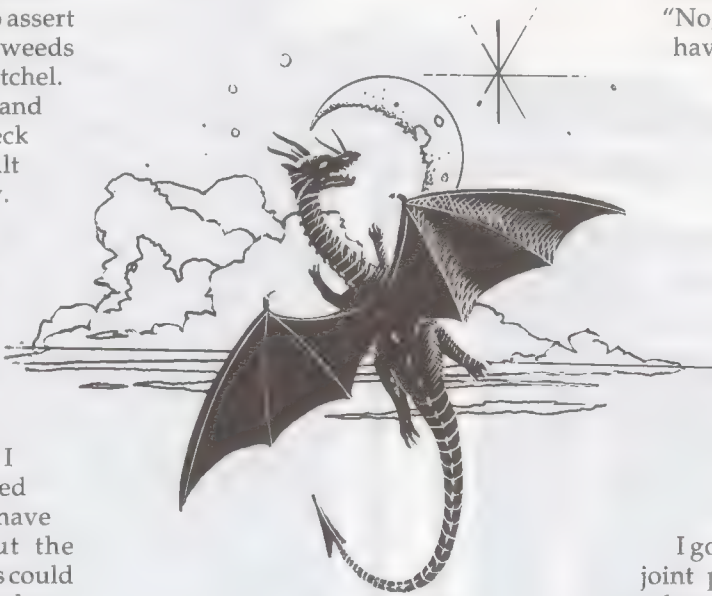
The big dragon extended its wings. I thought it was about to swoop down on them like an owl on a pair of field mice, but instead it launched itself into the air and rose, passing over the enclosure and the ground where Thibault and I sat.

The dragonlets leapt into the air, rapidly and gracefully winging up to the castle wall. My jaw dropped open.

"I told you," Thibault whispered.

The dragonlets flew off the castle wall into the night, the dragon flowing after them like an enormous gray-black shadow.

I sat motionless until the stink had dissipated a bit. Thibault was already gathering our things.



"I'm not climbing down the mountain in the dark."

"It's nearly day," he said. "You slept for a long time."

"What about you?" I asked, after a moment.

"I slept a little."

I bet. "In any event, I'm not leaving without breakfast. I'll get one good meal out of His Grace, if nothing else." I scrubbed my eyes with the heels of my hands. "What happened here?"

"They're on their way home," he said.

"How do you know that?"

"Where else would they go?" he said, with great patience.

Where else, indeed. "Is this more of your common sense?"

He glanced at me to see if I was mocking him. I wasn't. "Yes."

"Bon voyage," I murmured. "How did you know it wouldn't kill them?"

"He killed them because he couldn't save them," Thibault said. "These two he could save." He bit his lip. "I think he may be their mother."

He may be their mother. I nearly laughed, but Thibault looked so serious I refrained from pointing out that *he's* are very rarely, if ever, mothers. Besides, I had something else, of rather greater importance, to say to him.

"I'm sorry."

Thibault looked away. "His lordship should never have bought those eggs."

"His Grace," I corrected.

"His Grace."

"No," I agreed. "He should never have done it. Well. Shall we go?"

"Where?"

"Breakfast."

"And then?"

And then. "I'm open to suggestions."

"I've always wanted to see Paris," he said, idly.

"I remember you mentioning that." Hundreds of times. "Oddly enough, I just had a dream about Paris."

"Oh?" he said, sounding quite interested. "Perhaps it's a sign."

Hmm. I'd rather not think so.

I got up slowly, every muscle and joint protesting. "It's a long way, you know. And you'll probably be disappointed. It's just a city." A big, dirty, crowded, loud, expensive, wonderful city.

"I'll take that risk," Thibault said. *

PATRICIA RUSSO has previously been published in the Tor anthology **WOMEN OF DARKNESS**, as well as in small press zines such as *Space and Time*, *White Knuckles*, *Symphonie's Gift*, *Dark Muse*, and *Nyx Obscura*. She notes that reading **THE THREE MUSKETEERS** inspired her to create the characters Jouffroi and Thibault.

VINCENT DI FATE is regarded as one of the world's major illustrators of futuristic themes.

Artwork by Vincent Di Fate

*Don't forget to vote for your favorite authors & artists —
use the Cauldron ballot on page 63*

"Mcgauhy" (via e-mail)

I am hoping that perhaps you are at, or near, the point where some sort of a collection will be done of the pieces for writers and wannabees.

Pieces such as Barbara Rosen's "The Next Time You Feel Sorry for Yourself", Heather Rose Jones' "Show, Don't Tell", Ann Sharp's "How Can I Write Sympathetic Characters?" or "The Write Software", etc.

If such a collection is planned, or I missed it, I'm sure I'm not the only one who's interested!

Until we sell out of the back issues with these articles, we probably won't post them on the web. And we're talking to Marion's agent about exactly the kind of book you describe. — reh



Frank Tuttle

I just saw the new Web page for MZBFM. The old one was nice, but this one looks wonderful, and it even seems to load faster! Good work.

Another fine job by Margaret Davis. — reh



Fran Applequist

Dear Mr. Bradley:

Thank you for putting "What is a Short Story" online.

I subscribe to a how-to-write magazine. I cut out the best of the articles and keep them in a binder organized by category (dialog, description, plotting, etc.). If I am struggling with an aspect of my writing I go to my binder and find help on that topic. This process has improved my ratio of submitted stories to published stories.

However, "What is a Short Story" is not in my "how-to-write" binder because it is in the front of my binder of guidelines. When I look for a place to send each story, your article will be the first thing I see. I believe it will slow me down, make me take another look at my story, and help me decide if it's ready to be sent.

Thank you, again.

You're very welcome. But as regular readers know, I'm Mrs. Bradley. — MZB



More Grammar Peeves

"Whyzz" (via e-mail)

Please add that the apostrophe is used for possessive, not plurals. (the other side of its/it's)

1 girl, 2 girls, a girl's toy (1 girl), all the girl's toys, (1 girl, several toys), all the girls' toys (several girls and several toys)



Margaret L. Carter (via e-mail)

I enjoyed the Grammar article in the latest issue very much. I must agree that "it's/its" tops the list. I belong to two online writing workshops. In one of them "it's" for "its" shows up in the submissions over and over, even though those who make the error are consistently soundly trounced for it in the critiques, which are distributed to the whole list. It makes me wonder whether most of the writers ever read

the critiques (or do they all suffer from some sort of "its"-related dyslexia?).

Other phenomena that make my teeth grind:

Use of "disinterested" for "uninterested".

People who don't know the difference between "prone" and "supine" and use the former for any character who's lying down.

People who can't keep "lie" and "lay" straight, especially those who overcorrect by using "lay" as the past tense of "lay". An editor did that to me once, without consulting me, changing a correct "laid" to an incorrect "lay", which I didn't know about until the book was published. So anyone who reads this anthology will think I actually wrote the gag-making sentence, "He lay her on the bed."

"Who", like "laid" and "me", seems to be a "bad word" to some writers. Many people overcorrect by using "who" inaccurately in subordinate clauses. "We'll give a prize to whomever walks in the door next" — "whoever" is the correct subject of the subordinate clause, and the whole clause is the object of "to".

"That's the man whom the witness said robbed the bank" — a bit more tricky, I admit. "The witness said" should be treated as parenthetical, and the whole clause "who robbed the bank" is the object of "said". Amazing how many professional writers flub that one in print. Where are the copyeditors?!

"Different than" makes my stomach hurt, but it seems to be creeping into standard English. I avoid it whenever possible and advise others to do so if the subject comes up.

When I was in high school, we were taught a distinction between "shall" and "will" that depended on whether the action was compulsory or not, but that rule seems to be dead.

And of course the "split infinitive" prohibition was never legitimate, but rather an invalid generalization from Latin. It's just that splitting them is more often than not rather awkward. But sometimes keeping them unsplit is awkward.

I turned 50 this year, and when I was in public school (Norfolk, VA), the subject called "English" was almost all grammar drill until seventh grade. In fact, I thought I detested English until I discovered it also meant studying literature. To me, all that homework meant endless repetition of exercises that I thought (in my youthful arrogance) any fool should be able to master in one day. Now, however, I realize I was lucky. In "our day" teachers may have gone overboard with rote drill, but at least we did learn the mechanics. In editing my own fanzine, I have despaired of getting people to use commas precisely and now ask them to correct only the most glaring goofs.

Keep up the good fight!



Carmine J. Civalo

How about "as if" and "as though"?

Or when effect is mistaken for affect.



Kendra Swope

How about the difference between "who" and "whom"? I

continued on page 60

PORSCHE DIVINE

by Peter Krug

What began as a casual discussion of thunderbolts developed by degrees into a childish squabble. Thor, brandishing his cane, characterized Zeus's devotees as a gaggle of sissified pederasts; Zeus maintained that the irascible old thunder god was nothing but a loutish ape in a winged helmet. To Zeus's delight, the commotion brought Nurse Lively on a run.

Effortlessly, she eased the aged Norse deity back down onto his rocker and warned him that if he continued to misbehave, there would be no pudding for him after the evening meal. Then as a precaution she wheeled Zeus's chair away to the south end of the verandah, where he could sun himself while enjoying a particularly pleasant view of the bright gardens and broad lawns that skirted the Old Deities' Home. Slowly, as though speaking to a child, she asked him if there was anything else she might do for him. Oh, yes, he reflected lecherously, there is so very, *very* much you might do. Aware, however, that this was not the optimum moment, he simply asked her the time of day. She informed him it was a quarter after three.

Excellent, he said to himself. Hera will be in the Television Room, engrossed in Oprah. Running trembling

fingers over a snowy beard, he smiled wanly and requested she please draw his shawl a little higher around his bony shoulders. As she bent, he noticed with no small delight the buttons she had neglected to fasten. He caught a tantalizing glimpse of delicate lace enclosing a formidable bosom and trembled.

Oh, how he adored mortal females! Even after all these millennia, they continued to mystify and to intrigue him. Perhaps, he reflected, it was their marvelous perversity that enticed him so. Europa's preoccupation with bulls came at once to mind. And who but he could have guessed how Leda might respond to a male swan? Wistfully, he wished those buttons had been left undone for his enticement, but knew better.

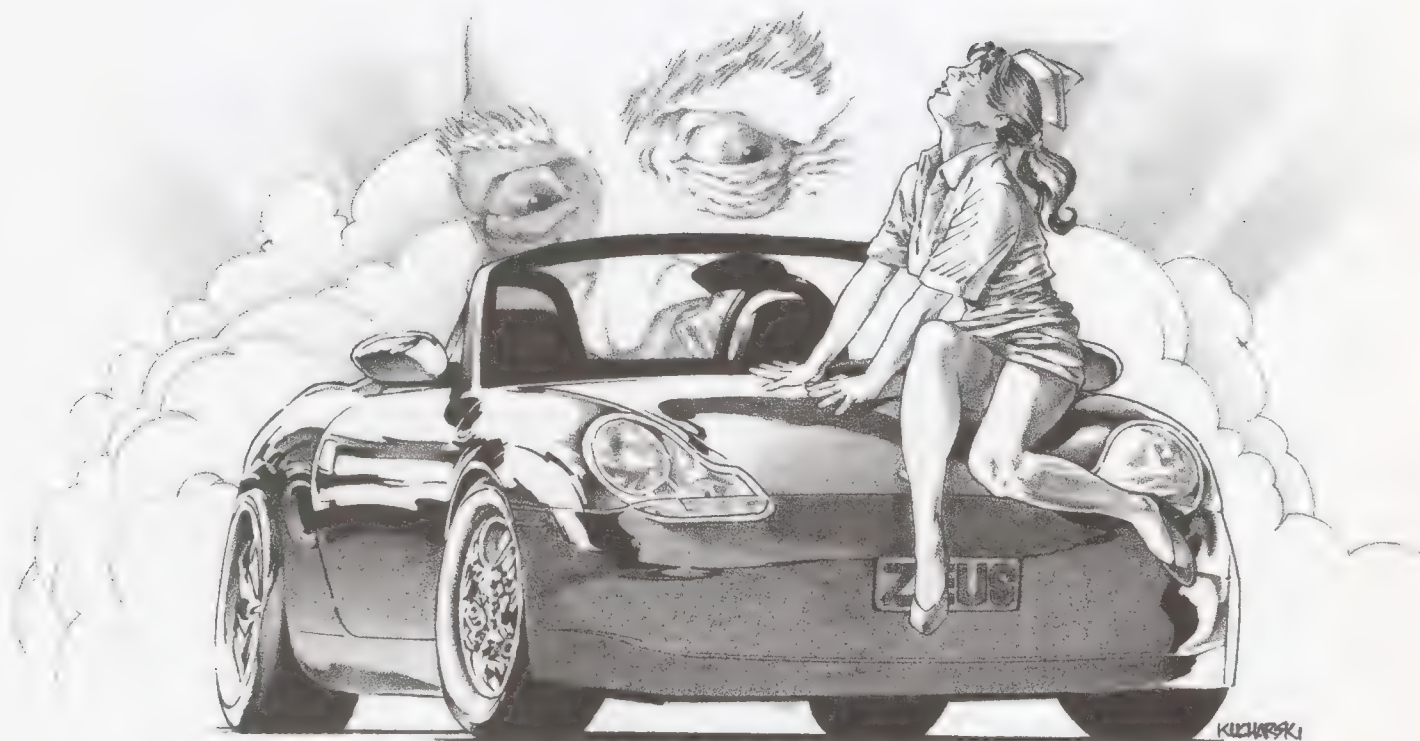
Nurse Lively's romantic interest, regrettably, was that buffoon, Doctor Pinkard. What did she see in that balding, bespectacled scarecrow, he wondered, that embodiment of all mortal male imperfections? Stealthily, he stole a glance inside her mind. Ah-ha! Just as he had suspected, it was the car, Pinkard's gleaming, roaring, spanking-new Porsche. Sleek, powerful, trembling with erotic energy, it was a stamping, snorting glass-and-metal bull.

Europa herself could not have resisted its lure.

As he enjoyed one last fleeting peek at that miraculous bosom, he began to formulate a scheme. Transforming himself into an animal form today, he knew, would be quite beyond his sadly diminished capabilities. An automobile, however, even the exquisite contraption that caused Nurse Lively's heart to race, would be another matter entirely. The whole damned machine was less complex than the capillaries of a bull's eyeball.

He could do it; he knew he could. Even in his lamentably time-ravaged state, he was not utterly without resources. For months now, he had been hoarding tiny bits of divine energy. No one, not even Hera, was aware of his painstakingly collected cache. He had been saving it all for one very special night, and this would be the night.

That evening, he gloated, when the enchanting Nurse Lively descended to the parking lot, she would find a sleek Porsche ... strictly top-of-the-line, not Pinkard's pitiful mid-range model ... its door ajar, purring mightily at the curb, presenting the irresistible temptation to slip behind the wheel for just a moment, to relish the richness of the upholstery, to savor the sweet vibra-



tion of a powerful engine against smooth, sensitive flesh.

Then, like Europa before her, she would be his. Away they would fly, through fields and forests, over mountains and across rivers, until the perfect spot, perhaps some flowery, secluded meadow, presented itself. There in the moonlight he would utilize what remained of his accumulated power to manifest himself for one brief hour as he had once been, vibrantly youthful, supernaturally strong, phenomenally virile. She would be powerless to rebuff him; no mortal woman before her ever had. Not one.

Abruptly, an annoying drone drew him from his erotic reverie; he shivered with dread. The gadflies he thought, not those damned gadflies! Nurse Lively drew back in alarm, crying out and thrashing the air, swatting frantically at the buzzing, biting insects that only the two of them could see. As he watched helplessly, she stumbled across the verandah, lost her footing at the top of the stairs and tumbled ungracefully end over buxom end down onto the pavement below. Frantically Zeus reached out his mind to where she lay moaning and saw to his dismay her exquisite left leg severely fractured. In a desperate gesture of

Olympian compassion, he squandered the better part of his accumulated power to mend shattered bone, to shrink swollen, bruised flesh, to wipe away the agony the poor, sweet woman suffered.

Several staff members came racing to her aid. One pushed through the crowd to kneel beside her. Damn! Zeus lamented, of all people it would have to be Pinkard. As the old god watched, smoldering with frustration, Pinkard assisted her to a nearby bench, examined her still-discolored flesh and announced that he would bring the Porsche around, that he would take her home at once. With the last faint spark of his waning might, Zeus peered inside Nurse Lively's mind and saw to his consternation just *how* she planned to reward the Doctor's thoughtfulness. The old god shuddered, overcome with jealous, impotent rage.

Beaten and downcast, he turned his chair slowly away. He was not at all surprised to see Hera's wizened face peering out from behind lace curtains, grinning at him triumphantly. Damn that meddling crone, he lamented, she did it to me again. If there are real gods in this mad universe, they must be having a jolly laugh right now.

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PETER KRUG was born in Pasadena, CA, in 1942, but grew up in Marin. He studied Literature and Creative Writing at College of Marin, San Francisco City College, and S.F. State University. He was once described in *Rolling Stone Magazine* as "the Bob Dylan of Berkeley", though he feels Country Joe is more deserving of that honor. In 1969 he fled the City and lives presently on the Russian River with a very talented ceramic artist named Linda and three cats in a house he designed and built himself.

He has had quite a bit of success in the field of song writing, having forty-one recorded songs to his credit. One of his songs, performed by Faith Petric (age 82 and going strong!), was included in the PBS documentary *Roam, Sweet Home* (aired Aug. 1997). Currently, he has a science fiction novel completed and presumably sitting at the moment in a pile of manuscripts on Peter Stampfel's desk at DAW Books, hopefully somewhere near the top.

MICHAEL KUCHARSKI has worked as a professional illustrator and graphic artist in the advertising and journalism fields for nearly two decades. In recent years he has begun showing his work in art shows at science fiction conventions. Michael lives near Detroit.

City Magic

by Marian Flandrick Bray

When I was getting the idea to cross out the names of the two leading gangs in our barrio and write the tag *King Big* next to the crossed-out names, that's when I first saw him.

It was early morning. The fog clung to the streets like dirty haze and the streetlights, the ones that weren't shot out, barely broke through the gloom with their orange lights.

I thought he was a dog, a skinny, yellow-brown, long-legged, and long-snouted dog, not a macho pitbull you always saw in junk car yards and dirt backyards, but a regular sort of lanky dog that you'd seen trotting at his master's scruffy heels. No beauty or purebred, that was for sure. The dog sat in the sandy dirt of the riverbed, on the edge of the golf course and stared up at me for a full minute.

I felt like saying, Take a picture, man. But you don't talk to dogs, do you? Besides, he had this wild look edging around his yellow eyes and he crept me out. Some of that might have been because I was ten feet high on the golf course sign, hanging onto the bottom rungs with my knees and one arm while finishing the spray paint lettering KING

BIG, all cool and slanted, the color of a summer, desert sky. That was my trademark. Bright colors.

Most taggers use black or white if the canvas, meaning fence or wall or whatever, was dark, but I liked to be creative, you know? And I wanted the tag to shine over those Congo Boys' signs.

When I finished the downslant of the second "I", I paused and glanced down. That dog still stared up at me.

"Get!" I said in a deep, growly voice. The dog didn't take his eyes off me or even budge.

If only I had a rock. Then he'd move in a hurry. Dogs basically crept me out, ever since I got bit when I was in the second grade. Our neighbor's dobie-rottie cross had thought he'd snack on me or something. I didn't do nothing to that dog. Twenty-four stitches later sewed up my shoulder. I still have the jagged scar. If I want to seem tough, I tell some people I was knifed. Most people don't know the difference.

I shook the can, sprayed the final letter and made a couple of swirly lines around the tag. Done.

The dog was still there. Darn him. I wanted him to go away. The dawn

light had brightened everything. I grinned thinking that the dog's eyes were the color of unflushed toilet water. I threw the spray paint can at him.

He merely ducked and the can flew over his long head. Then he stood, shook himself, still staring up at me, then he pointed his nose and gave a mournful howl. Not the way dogs do during police and fire sirens, but a pure, wild, knowing howl.

When the howl was over, he glanced at me again, then trotted off and vanished into the bridge overpass shadows.

The sky lightened more. I didn't have all day. Not to mention I was, like, trespassing. Not the golf course, though. I could care less about the stupid gardeners and in their electric golf carts, but I was in Congo Boys territory, while I was from the Rio Lords neighborhood.

"Who's this King Big?" asked Mario. He was second in command to our neighborhood gang, the Rio Lords. Our street runs along the Santa Ana riverbed, from First Street to the south edge of the golf course, which was down in

the Santa Ana riverbed, when there wasn't any water, which was most of the time. North of the golf course, where I'd seen the weird dog, was Congo Boys country.

"King Big is just some punk kid screwing around," said Pepe. I froze, expecting names to start flying, mine included. But I wasn't screwing around. I had a plan. Well, sort of.

My older brother, Felipe, lolled against the uneven brick wall in the walkway between the condos' blocks. He was the leader of Rio Lords. He cracked his neck by tipping it to the right, then to the left.

"Man, that's disgusting," said Mario. "Your head's gonna fall off one day."

Felipe just said, "I hear a new gang is forming, over on Fifth. Maybe that's where King Pig is from."

That brought laughter and swine sounds.

I began to breathe easier. As long as King Big wasn't traced to me. Everyone knew I wasn't into gangs, even though everyone knew I supported my brother by hanging out with the Rio Lords. They also knew I tagged. I'm a pretty good artist, if I do say so myself. Everyone on our street acknowledges that. "Yeah, that boy, he can draw a picture that looks so real. He draws a pancake and you want to eat it and more."

Felipe jerked his chin at a couple of lesser gangbangers and told them to get tagging. "Wipe out King Pig's name," he said.

The tagging war was on. Which was exactly what I wanted.

The next morning, early, just as the dawn lifted the night, I was spray painting, again. The fresh Rio Lords' names and signs splashed over and around my King Big. Some jokester had drawn a fat pig with a curly tail.

I x-ed out all the Rio Lord tags, the pig, too, then wrote King Big everywhere along the sign on the golf course. I mean, everywhere. My hand was aching when I was done.

I still had a little time so I thought I'd hit the overpass slab sides. I dropped off the golf sign, ten feet down into the weedy grass. My ankles stung on impact. When I straightened up, a man was standing just about where the dog had been yesterday.

He could have been the dog's master or alter ego. He had yellowish-brown hair, not really blond, but sort of a

worn-out brown, sprouting from under his black knit cap. Hair even burst out from his ears which was pretty gross.

"Hey, m'ijo," he said.

I didn't even know this guy. Who was he calling me his son? I didn't have to talk to him.

"You King Big?" he asked me.

"Nah, I'm the Queen of England," I said and tossed my empty spray can into the weeds near his feet. I didn't have the nerve to throw it right at him though I wished I did.

"You do pretty letters, but can you do anything else?" he asked.

I put my hands on my hips and stared into his eyes. Yellow they were, like he had that liver disease that turned you the color of puree bananas.

"Yeah, man, I can draw anything you want." My abuela, my grandmother, always said I had magic in my fingers. From her side of the family, of course.

"Let's see a truck," he said in a challenging voice.

"Where?" I asked. "In the dirt?" I don't know why I wanted to show. Maybe it was his cocky attitude, like he didn't think I could draw my way out of a spray paint can.

He nodded, flicking a stick at me. I



Artwork by Alan Gutierrez

caught it, stomped around, looking for a smooth bit of sand and drew.

Fine. So I drew fast. A tidy U-Haul truck, like we always see when people are moving in and out the apartments across the street from our condos.

I stood back and the man peered over it. "Not bad," he said.

"How about a lady with her kid?"

I thought a minute, then drew Lucia, a neighbor girl who was just fifteen with her baby.

"Like it better than the truck. King Big, you're okay with the pictures," he said.

"I got magic in my fingers," I blurted out. Then felt stupid for saying that.

His eyes narrowed, turned darker. Behind him the sun rose into a basket of angry clouds and sent out cold light across the golf course and riverbed. Then his face softened a bit and he asked seriously, "Really? Magic, huh?"

He made me even more nervous. "You want me to draw anything else?" I asked.

"How about a coyote?"

Right then police sirens shrieked on the bridge over our heads. We both bolted into the shadows. Cops spilled down the riverbed, heading for the complex on the other side of the bridge.

Not after me. Not this time.

I glanced around from the shadows of the overpass. Cars and trucks hummed, vibrating the concrete legs of the bridge beast. The man was gone. A movement up on the levee caught my eye.

It was the dog I'd seen yesterday morning. Only now I knew it wasn't a dog, but the dog's wild brother, a coyote.

For the next two days I spent my dawns in Congo Boys land, crossing out their boring tags and scrawling in my King Big, trying to jazz up the letters with different colors, different letter styles. I didn't see the man or the coyote those days.

I told myself I just happened to see the dog — who heard of coyotes in the city? — where the man had been. The

dog had been scared out of his nearby hooch by the cops. I'd just thought it looked like a coyote. Because of what I thought I heard the man ask about my next drawing.

The next day after that, for a solid week, I was sick with the flu. At night I heard from Felipe that King Big was moving through the streets. He'd taken on a life of his own, which was kind of scary.

"He's hunting trouble," said Felipe, chewing his thumbnail one night during the week I was sick. He tended to think out loud with me around because I was sort of a neutral person to bounce ideas off, especially when I was dazed with sickness. "I think I'm gonna talk with Chuy about making a pact against this King Big and his crew."

I nearly gave a whoop of delight.

Chuy was Congo Boys' leader. I couldn't believe my plan was falling so neatly into place. It was good I was sick because Felipe didn't notice my excitement and went on with his war games while I wished I had the strength to get up and go to the bathroom.

See, I'd figured if I could get my brother and the Congo Boys' jefe to unite against King Big, then they'd quit fighting between each other. They'd have a common enemy.

I was terrified Felipe or another of my homies would get killed in a driveby or some other gangbanger thing.

Finally after coughing my lungs out all week, I was finally better and sleeping when Friday night I suddenly woke up, not from coughing, but woke to the eerie, climbing wails of howling outside my window.

Not a dog's howl either.

The next day, late Saturday morning, I managed to climb out of bed on shaky legs and stagger outside to the alley where Felipe and his homies were brewing plans.

"The golf course, over by the big sign," Felipe was saying.

"Where we first seen King Big's sign. That's the place." Everyone nodded. One of the guys ruffled my hair.

"Feeling better, little brother?"

I nodded.

"Chuy and me got some ideas to dish out to King Big," added Felipe.

I wanted to stand up and cheer.

Now I had to think of what to do next. Small detail, right? How to manufacture King Big and his crew. I glanced at Felipe's watch. All in less than ten hours. No problem, right?



Artwork by Alan Gutierrez

Unsteadily I walked to the golf course, thick with men in funny clothes playing, and I hide in the thicket of native oak trees. My heart pounded from the walk. Man, if only I wasn't still sick. Now how was I gonna hoax the gangbangers from Rio Lords and Congo Boys?

If Congo Boys found out that I'd staged this King Big thing they would take it as a personal insult, my brother being the leader of Rio Lords. I hadn't thought of that angle earlier? Maybe I hadn't believed I could pull it off.

I'd had this vague idea of stealing a bunch of light sticks, you know, the kind you snap and the chemicals mix together and the stuff glows. Then I'd cut open the glowing stuff and goop it on myself and maybe some neighbor dogs, if I could find some friendly ones. That would be scary, right? Wrong. Too complicated, not to mention I wasn't on good terms with any dogs.

What I needed was something spectacular and fast. In and out.

Something to shake up the two gangs and make them want to stick together and fight something else, not each other.

I sat in the crook of one of the old oak trees and broke off a growing acorn. Could I gather acorns and dump them on the guys?

Glowing acorns? I rubbed my eyes. I was still sick with the flu. That much I knew.

Maybe I'd just have to call off the rumble. Say, King Big was had herpes or something. Maybe I could find a kid from outside the barrio to carry a message to Felipe and Chuy. Sure. What kid in his right mind would take a message to two gang leaders?

Dried weeds crackled. A stupid golfer with no aim. But instead of a man in funny clothes, just a funny-looking man entered the grove of oaks. The yellow man with hair.

He still had fur sprouting from his ears. His shirt was unbuttoned at the throat and his chest hair sprouted out like a chia pet gone wild.

"Hey, magic fingers," he said. "Got trouble, huh?"

Maybe I was too sick and tired to be amazed or even argue. I just went, "Uh, huh. I'm in deep doo doo." He was a good listener, yellow eyes and all, so I told him. All of it. Even the howls I'd heard in my feverish state.

When I was done, he smiled. His teeth were yellow and pointed. Like he



needed Dr. Beauchamp and the twilight sleep bad. But he told me, "I think I can help you, Magic Fingers."

I was still up the tree. Maybe I didn't trust him as much as my mouth did. "You?" was all I said and sort of laughed.

"Let's make a deal," he said and stood under me. My feet dangled down just an inch above his furry head. His ears peeked out from all the hair and they were pointed like Spock's from Star Trek, only hairy.

"What kind of deal?" I asked.

"Give me your magic fingers and you leave the rest up to me."

I drew my legs up close to my body. What did he want? To chop my hands off? "What do you mean?" I squeaked, because after all, I loved my brother, Felipe, even though he was stupid enough to be a gang leader. I'd do almost anything. Losing my hands would be nothing compared with losing, you know, Felipe's life.

That smile showed again, sharp and toothy. "Agree to give me your magic

fingers and I'll take care of impressing your gangbangers."

"It won't hurt, will it?"

He actually laughed. "Not at all. I specialize in painless methods."

So I took a deep breath and said in a rush, "Okay, I give you my hands, my fingers, whatever."

"Thank you, Antonio," he said formally. "I will meet you here at nine-thirty tonight."

Then he walked out of the trees. The dried leaves and weeds crunched under his feet. After a moment I couldn't see him but heard him leaving. His two-step gait changed to a four-beat gait. Then, shocked, I wondered how he knew my first name. Little fingers of fear ran up and down my spine.

That night the golf course was a pool of darkness. On the outskirts the city lights sparkled through the faux fog rising because of the manmade ponds on the golf course. I reached the oak trees fifteen minutes early to watch for his approach, but he was already there, leaning against the tree trunk, smok-

ing a cigarette, the red glow like an eye.

"That's a coffin nail," I said.

"Not for me," he said. "I'm beyond that."

"It must be nice," I muttered.

He just grinned, showing sharp teeth. We stood together uncomfortably for over an hour. Time took a strange jump, like I'd been under that tree for all my life, yet the hour rushed away fast as spray paint. I knew we had to wait together and somehow in the waiting the two of us blended together like watercolors.

When the two gangs slipped on the golf course, assembling quietly in twos or threes, with an occasional single figure, I felt ready, to do what I didn't know. But something. Fog swirling around them like blurred lines of a brush stroke.

Now what? I turned and the man was gone. Gone! My heart caught in my throat. He split on me. I choked. He was a con.

I started to scramble up a tree to hide, but a couple of flashlight beams shot across the grass and played up high on the sign, illuminating the graffiti and the broad limbs of trees. I dropped. Better to crouch behind the tree.

"King Pig!" my brother's voice rang out. "Show yourself!"

Without King Big, without a common enemy to unite them, the two gangs would turn on each other like Tasmanian devils.

"Draw," a growly voice said in my ear.

It was the yellow dog. But he had the man's eyes. "Draw," he growled again and his breath smelled of cigarettes.

I stammered, "Wha-a-at should I

draw?"

"Anything. Just draw."

Uncertainly I picked up a stick and in the dirt I drew criss-crossing lines, the way a child would draw a star.

Someone on the golf course yelled. In the sky exploded a white burst, fireworks.

Quickly I drew another and another star. Color exploded over the golf course. The gang members screamed and ran and covered their heads with their arms.

When I paused the yellow eyes gleamed in the night and the growling voice said: "Draw."

So I did. I sketched a glider plane. Silently one whooshed low over the heads of the homies. More yelling burst across the grasses. On the edge of the golf course an automatic weapon chattered.

I wouldn't put up with that. No weapons. Concentrating, I outlined a giant magnet with guns and knives tractor-beaming in and sticking to the magnet.

Instantly the air was filled metallic slammings as hand guns, rifles and switchblades jetted away and struck the magnet.

A couple of homies started running for the magnet, but I drew a yawning hole. They pulled up just in time, inches from the chasm.

Then I drew many long-nosed dogs, actually more like those Southwestern coyotes sitting on their haunches, noses tipped up deco.

Nevertheless, they made a fierce guard, chasing, gathering, driving the homies together like a bunch of sheep.

Then I drew a squad car. I didn't want Felipe in trouble, but I wanted

him alive. Sirens began shrieking as the first cop car arrived, then others followed. A few homies got away. I let them go. My coyotes blurred into the fog. When I glanced around my yellow-eyed companion was also gone.

I put down my stick, wearily. Somehow I dragged home and into bed. The weakness of the flu heavy on me again. But I got no rest because our house was in uproar. Felipe was in Juvie Hall. Mama ran around, screaming in Spanish.

I tried drawing on the floor, a gag to shut her mouth, but she kept screaming until her brother calmed her down.

After a couple of days we got Felipe out of juvie. For some reason he got all interested in helping me with my artwork. Then my paintings began winning prizes in local school contests. Then in regional contests. I even had an art show with some other Mexican-American artists. I was the youngest!

Felipe became my business manager. I kept him so busy he didn't have time to trash around with the Rio Lords. The Congo Boys and the Rio Lords had made a truce that night because of the strange magic that ran through the golf course, somehow linking to King Big. Of course, the cops never believed them. I think the gangbangers hardly believed it themselves. Most of them stopped banging over the month.

I guess magic was in my fingers. Whether it had always been there or not, I'm not sure. But most every night I try to remember to put out a bowl of dog food. Mama thinks I'm loco. I never see that yellow coyote guy, but you know, the food is always gone in the morning. It's the least I can do to thank him.

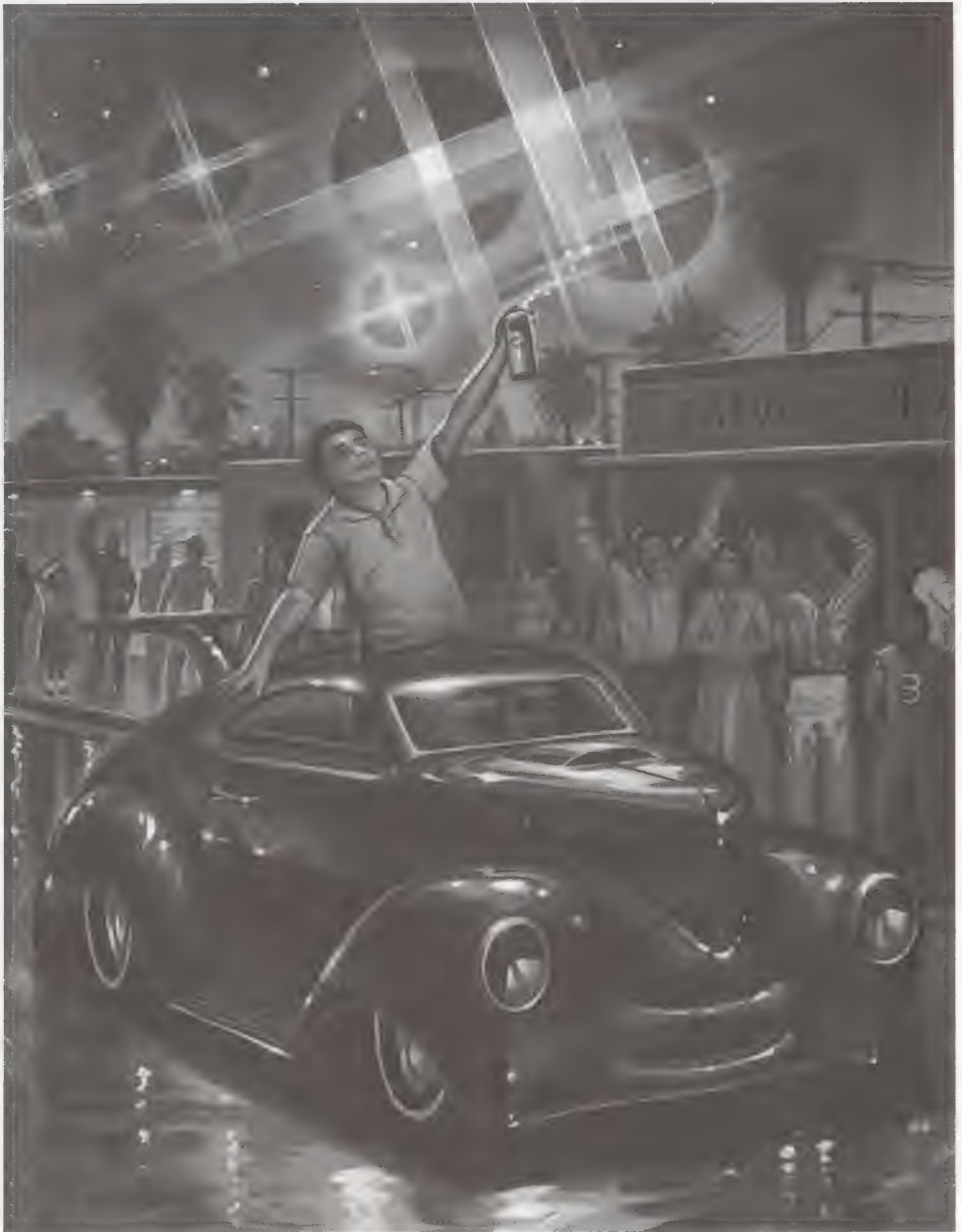
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MARIAN FLANDRICK BRAY tells us: "In addition to writing, I substitute teach in the Santa Ana school district (where 'City Magic' takes place) and am on-call 24 hours a day with Orange County Search and Rescue. I'm also a wife and the mother of a four-year-old daughter, Piper. My 17th work, a short story called 'The Pale Mare' in **STAY TRUE: SHORT STORIES FOR STRONG GIRLS**, a YA anthology edited by Marilyn Singer, is a Spring 1998 release from Scholastic Books.

ALAN GUTIERREZ lives in Sedona, Arizona with his wife and daughter. He has been artist guest of honor at several sf conventions and has appeared in these pages many times.



Artwork by Alan Gutierrez



Artwork by Alan Gutierrez

An Interview With eluki bes shahar

by Rachel E. Holmen

eluki bes shahar is the author (often as "Rosemary Edghill") of fantasy novels, mysteries, science fiction novels, romances, and X-Men novels. We share an interest in history, costuming, and art.

MZBFM: Last night you were telling me a catalog of books you've published. Can you run that down again?

eluki: Four Regencies, three science fiction novels, three fantasies, three mysteries, a time-travel romance, two X-Men novels, with another X-Men novel in the pipeline, a collaboration with Andre Norton which will be out from Tor in April, 1999; and six other books that I've signed nondisclosure agreements on.

[Chuckles] Okay. I've most recently read the three fantasy novels, and I really enjoyed them, especially the humor in them.

They were a lot of fun. Everybody, apparently, has lived their entire lives in hopes of seeing an elf mugged. And since that is the first scene in **SWORD OF MAIDEN'S TEARS**, they think it's pretty cool from there on. But it's also the book I get the most complaints about, because people think the ending's too down. I just figured it was **CASABLANCA**, you know, except he gets on the plane to Lisbon...

And it made a good opening for the second novel.

Apparently the emotional damage that occurs to the five characters — the five humans from earth that I start out with, the librarians — is really unacceptable to some people's idea of what they want to see in a fantasy.

To me, that just made it seem more real.

That was the complaint.

Ever since my friends started dying, I need books that have some sense of reality to them, that DON'T just have this never-never-land quality to them...I enjoyed the fact that those seemed like real people with real choices. For instance, Phillip is a twit, and yet they have to depend on him at one point.

Well, he's a sociopath but he's my sociopath, and with all my characters, even the villains — especially the villains — there isn't any character in any of my books that I don't love, even the really rotten, awful ones.

You do a pretty mean monster.

Oh, poor Kevin. It wasn't his fault, really it wasn't. He just had this one moment of wanting something that was really terrific, that turned out to be Melior's sword; it was not his fault there was a curse on it. He did his best with what he had available in terms of his training, his intellect, his information, his emotions, and his moral courage. If he made a botch of it, he's not unique.

Hardly. The mysteries, which I have read two of, featuring your character Bast...

The first one is based very closely on an actual death in the neo-pagan community that occurred in the early eighties,

that I heard about. The woman went home one night, locked her door, lay down on her bed, and died. Of course, that was all that anyone *knew* about that, because this is real life, but it had haunted me for years. Then it intersected with my desire to write an ecclesiastical murder mystery. There've been mysteries with Catholic priests and Catholic nuns — there are probably even Mormon detectives — but I wanted to do one about *us*, because ethics in the neo-pagan community has always been something that I was really, *really* interested in. So a bunch of different threads that had been nagging at me for years came together in this book. I got the first sixty pages done and reeled back in shock, because it was the first thing I'd set in the real world of the here and now, and you have to have so many things accurate for that! I'd done deep space, I'd done faery, I'd done the nineteenth century, where I feel very comfortable; but I had to go down and ride the subways, and make sure that the subway stations looked the way they looked, and check out all kinds of things, and prices, and locations, and....I got addicted. It's great writing stuff in the real world!

But you've done a lot of historical stuff as well. You mentioned that your library is seven thousand volumes.

The bare minimum necessary to support human life. I did deaccession a book once, about the Hohenzollern dynasty. The following week I desperately needed it, so I've never gotten rid of a book since. I'm researching in several areas at the moment. I'm doing Restoration London for the books I'm doing with Andre Norton, because although they actually take place in the alternate universe 1805, their jumping-off point is Restoration London. And there are all of the Regency books, and I'm getting involved with the Peninsular War which I really disliked when I started out; I said, "No, I'll stay in London! You people across the channel can fend for yourselves!" But as time's gone on, I've gotten more interested in the Napoleonic wars, which I believe should be called the Wellingtonian wars, because he did *win*, after all.

It's true; it's very unusual to name a war after the loser.



Well, he was incredibly charismatic; I don't see it myself, but everyone at the time says that he was, and he just came in and invented modern warfare, which involved the army foraging along the way which meant that he just about destroyed France as well as the other places that he fought.

Charismatic, psychotic, totally changed the politics of France; an incredibly modern politician, destroyed the last of the medieval hangovers in Europe; of course I think he's scum.

[Laughs] *His empire probably extended farther than Alexander's did; he set one of his relatives on the throne in Mexico, as I recall.*

He did; he had extensive New World properties, although since the American revolution had occurred, he was willing to sell Louisiana to the Americans, which would not have been the case if it were still subject to England.

My memory was vague about who we bought it from.

I'm vague on things except with a pile of books at my elbow or when I'm directly in the middle of a book. When I'm in the middle of a book, I can sound profoundly erudite, but once the book goes away, so does all of my knowledge about whatever period I'm writing. So I sort of wander around looking vague and stammering, "Books? Oh, yes, I write books...I think."

I've been very pleased that someone with your sense of humor has taken up writing Regencies.

Well, a grim Regency is sort of a contradiction in terms; they are essentially "Bertie Wooster in the nineteenth century"; they're comedies of manners. People have these absolutely adolescent storms of emotion over things that in the long run absolutely don't matter. At the end of a Regency, everyone is still going to be eating, and everybody's still going to be living indoors; they may have lost the fashionable address, or not have vouchers for Almack's; but in the end, nobody's dying in agony in a ditch somewhere.

This is nice.

They're hard to write; they're like juggling. My natural tendency to ruin people's lives keeps trying to surface, and I keep batting it down. I semi-didn't manage to control that in **FLEETING FANCY**, the fourth book. My subtitle is "Four Rakes, No Waiting". I wrote it as a challenge book, because the editor said, "We are tired of rakes in Regency romances. We do not wish to see any more rakes. The readers do not wish to see any more rakes." So I went home over Thanksgiving and wrote a book

with between four and six rakes in it, depending on how you count. But in the end, everything works out happily, because that is what I insist for the end of all of my stories: that right triumphs, evil is punished, and everyone lives happily ever after.

[Dubiously] Okay.

I do a good job of concealing this in the mysteries, but trust me, this is the basic idea.

Tor has just published an omnibus volume of the first three Bast novels. But they've also said that they don't want to publish any more of them.

Well, they're saying

there isn't the market demand for more of them. I just think the market doesn't know they're there, and I'm hoping the omnibus will counteract this. If it doesn't, I still have available to me the option of continuing Bast as short stories, which are of course incredibly hard because I have to come up with a whole murder and a whole crime for a short story, which has always been the hardest part of a mystery, because I can't keep knocking off famous crimes in neo-paganism. For one thing, I'll run out.

But I've got three of those started, and I should be placing at least the first one somewhere within the next three months.

What is your life like, as a writer?

Writing is, you sit alone in a room. Yes, completely alone, in

Everyone's always wanted to see an elf mugged.

a room: you, your computer, and that's it, for hours and hours and hours. You don't see people, you don't talk to people, you don't answer the phone and have long, chatty conversations. Then you send the manuscript out, and later the editor says, "Yeah, great," but it starts feeling like throwing really large stones into a well. Sure, the water level is rising, but there isn't much in the way of feedback, so feedback and fan letters are really important. Sometimes you hang onto them to get you through the really, really blank bits in your life.

I think it would be extremely difficult to be a writer, because I would look at any page that I had done and think, "This isn't good enough," and it would be very hard to go on and write the next page.

Fortunately I never read my work until it's finished, so I can live in a fool's paradise. But basically, over a three month period, I have a standard series of reactions to my own writing that I go through for every single manuscript. The moment I'm done with it, I feel it's a work of positive genius. Approximately a month later, I believe it is the worst thing ever committed to paper in the history of mankind. A month or so after that, I'm fussing over the things I didn't do in it, because I can see how it would be a much better book if it were a completely different book. A couple of months after that I get the galley proof pages and I say, "Who wrote this?" Having completely lost the emotional connection to the work allows you to be completely ruthless at that point.

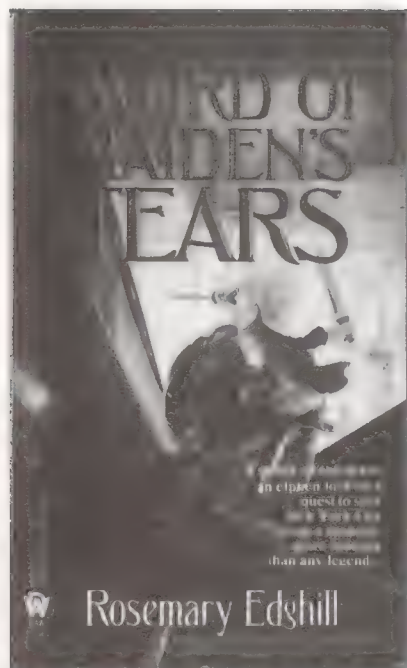
At the galley stage, all you're allowed to fix is small errors, right? You can't make major revisions.

No, but you can take stuff out. And you can wince a lot. I've started shortcutting this process by setting up my computer to print me out fake galleys. You catch repetition, you see where you're totally confusing people, you see where the scenes are too far apart.

Do you outline your books ahead of time? How do you plot out a book?

At the very beginning, I have about as much idea of what is going on, as you would have if you were telling the plot of a movie to a friend. Then I sit down and outline it in a list of scenes. An average hundred-thousand-word book will take approximately seventy scenes. I say things like, "Scene 1. Introduce Bast; introduce the bookie joint, which is where she works; context, time, date, place; because it's going to be important; and then I say, 'Phone rings; it's late.'" From that, I go on to do the basic introduction to the book, where she starts out explaining she's a Witch, which she does in a different way at a beginning of each book, and then give the reader a sense of





where she is because I'm about take off at a mad gallop for about three hundred pages.

I'll just go on outlining all of the scenes — I think I've got one of my outlines up on my home page. Then I start working off the outline and doing pages.

Do you pretty much follow your own outline?

Well, I try. The outline's the dress rehearsal for the book. You should meet and solve all your problems of logic, and who did what, in the outline. If you're honest with yourself, when you're writing it...if you're just saying, 'Well I'm sure

this will be okay,' you'll have the middle of your outline saying 'And then a miracle occurs,' and then you'll have to figure out exactly how they got from point A to point Z in the book. What I usually find myself doing between the outline and the book is dropping scenes. Because I generally have a lot more plot than I need.

I actually plotted out a short story and wrote it, but it's basically a beginning and an end; there is no middle. So there's no point.

I've had a short story sitting around that's been waiting for a middle for about eight years.

Middles are hard. I'm generally great at beginnings. I choke up at endings, because that means finishing the book and giving it away. But middles...you could just get lost in a structure-less morass in the middle. I try not to do that. As Raymond Chandler didn't say, "Every time the action gets slow, an orc comes through the door with an axe."

Have you always written?

Well, I've written for quite a long time. For many years I thought I was going to be an artist, and that turned out not to work out, with one thing and another. I've actually illustrated a couple of books; that was while I was working at SoHo Studio which is in some sense a model for Houston Graphics in the Bast books. The technology that Bast is using is way out of date because the computer came in just about the time that I quit working in the field, and SoHo was a little archaic even then. But I spent one summer doing 47 charts for a book on cardiovascular resuscitation, by hand and with presstype. These days, you would just do it on the computer, and it might take you maybe a week, but it took me three months.

Yes, computers have dramatically changed layout...

...and design, and the whole thing...Once when I was working at the studio, I made a connection to a previous era — I worked with hot type, and set cold type. The difference is, [repro from] hot type smears terribly, because it's ink on paper, it's not a sheet of photographic film. It was a complete nightmare working with it, because your perspiration would smear it, and this was a studio with no air conditioning in downtown New York in the summer. Running it through the wax machine would smear it; even fixative would make it smear. Anything would make this stuff smear.

Yet with all this wonderful technology in modern hands, people still do turn out layout that doesn't look that good.

The more I work with computer art, the more I appreciate art on paper.

It's got a flexibility that you don't find in the computer, and when I'm looking at animated cartoons, I can always tell which was the hand work and which was the computer work; the computer work is heartless, facile, and much too thin; it doesn't have depth or richness to it.

It's too perfect.

Well, it's not actually perfect, because it doesn't see the way the human eye sees, and the artist does.

In terms of your personal style, I see you sitting before me as a redhead, with tortoiseshell glasses, and orange stones in both a ring and a set of very lovely, dramatic earrings.

The earrings are amber, the ring is citrine, because amber isn't really hard enough to be in a ring that you wear every day — it will get bashed up — and the hair color and the glasses can change at a moment's notice. I wanted big, heavy, dramatic glasses, so these are actually sunglasses frames.

The amber is faceted in the earrings; you don't see that too often.

You're seeing more faceted amber now that the Wall's come down. There's a lot more multicolored stuff, too, and things that previously would just be staying home. The Victorians, of course, were mad for faceted amber, and I've got a faceted Victorian necklace at home. All the beads had different names — there were corals and horse-corals, and double-terminals...

I did a panel with Ellen Kushner and Delia Sherman once at a Boskone, called "Your Leather Jacket Will Find You". We ended up talking about cowboy boots. I'm still looking for my own personal perfect cowboy boots, but I do have three leather jackets.

My contribution was, if you're going to henna your hair, do it outdoors. Because it's a messy process, and your bathroom will look like the scene of an axe murder for weeks afterward and you'll spend the rest of your life trying to clean up. Either do it outside, or be more a cleaning neatnik than I will ever be, in my life.

There were two things that I gave up when I wanted to make time for my writing: one was cleaning, the other was cooking.

When I was working on my first book, I had no life. I went to work and I typed. My family thought that I had entered the witness protection program. They would keep saying, "Come and do this, come and do that," and I would say, "I can't," and they would say, "Why?" and I would say, "Well, I'll see you soon." Because I didn't want to tell anybody that I was working on a book in case I couldn't finish it. I did finish it — it was a 300,000-word Regency romance novel.

A bit longer than the average Regency by a factor of...three, yes?

Yes, so I cut it down to a hundred and twenty-five thousand words, swore to the editor that it was only a hundred thousand words, and sold it.

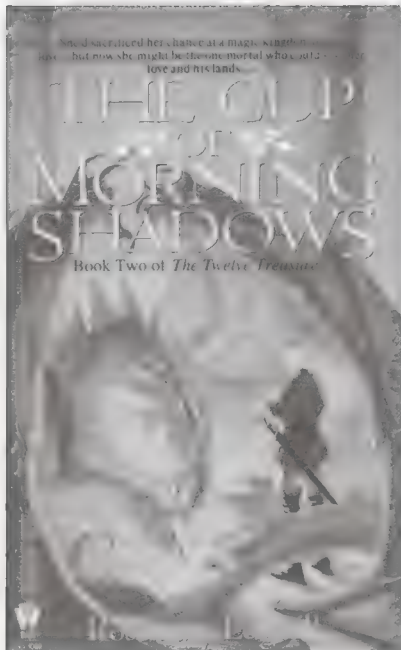
Hey! What book was that?

That was **TURKISH DELIGHT**, way back in 1980mumblemumble.

And before that, what had you done for a living?

At the time I wrote **TURKISH DELIGHT**, I was working as a secretary at a software publishing company. This was the job after the job as a book designer, which followed the job working as a bench jeweler, where I constructed jewelry, and that followed the job doing silkscreen designs for T-shirts — winceably adorable puppies, and teddy bears holding balloons...

In many ways, this sounds like the traditional checkered path of the writer.



Yes, it was two and a half hours door to door so I was spending five hours total on the commute. In the morning I was awake enough to do editorial work: write letters to the authors, read the slush pile, write letters to the agents, and then go into work and put in an 8 or 9 hour day. On the way home, I'd get the next chunk of the book done. I wrote two and a half books on the train.

[Sighs.] I'm awed.

I was crazy and I'm paying the horrible price now.

The horrible price being?

It totally threw out my hip permanently and compressed a disk — spending all that time on the train. But despite all that, it was a lot of fun; I still do consulting editorial work, and I'd love to have the job back, working at a publisher, but the commute? No. I got home from Avon every night at a quarter to nine.

And when did you eat?

Eat? At my desk at work.

Oh, what fun. Were you one of those people who always wanted to be a writer as a child? What do you remember as early reading?

James Bond. I was reading Ian Fleming around the age of age or nine. For some reason I developed a complete aversion to the children's library, so they let me into the adult library when I was between eight and ten. I was reading the books that were about at eye-level to me, so I was reading science fiction, and I was reading Edgar Rice Burroughs, and of course I've always been a comic book junkie. My main literary influences Mark Twain and Damon Runyon, which of course comes out very strongly in my first book, **HELLFLOWER**. One of my earliest memories was badgering my mom to take me out and buy me a copy of the Batman Annual. We went to four different stores until we got it.

My favorite story from that period is "Robin Dies at Dawn", a terrific, magnificent Batman story with great art and great covers. It was a major literary influence. And I'm not actually kidding here, because it deals with specifically what is real, what is unreal...in this plot, Batman, being the perfect physical specimen, has volunteered for a sensory deprivation experiment, involved with the manned flight to Mars. And as a result of this, afterwards he's having all these hallucinations where he's projecting an imaginary Martian landscape onto the real

world, and the question is, how is going to function in the real world when he's experiencing an imaginary one? And that's always fascinated me, that was when I was about five, so that would be, for completists, around 1961. You can probably check it in the DC backlist somewhere. But I went on from DC over to Marvel when I was twelve or so, and I've been a Marvel maniac for the rest of my life, and write X-Men novels now, for Boulevard (the media line for Berkley/Ace/Putnam), which is the completion of a lifelong dream; I've finally gotten my hands on the X-Men and I get to write them! This is cool!

So what are you hoping to do next?

Well, I'm hoping to get some more free time; I'm hoping to get my office cleaned out. [She has; since the interview, she's moved to an office with more room for her books.] I've got three books due by April; the one due specifically in April is the next X-Men novel, which involves Sabretooth and Tibet, and other than that, the plot elements are up for grabs. I am also contracted to do a second collaboration with Andre Norton, who's really terrific to work with, on another alternate-history Regency. It takes off when the Duke of Monmouth is discovered to be the legitimate child of Charles II and rules as Charles III, eliminating all of that unpleasantness and the Hanovers, which is only a plus!

*I just finished reading **The Great Roxhythe**, Georgette Heyer's Charles II novel, which paints him in really an unflattering light.*

Still, it was accurate; he had not an enormous amount of personal power when he came back and a lot of issues to work through from his childhood on the continent. He strongly resented Parliament and the English ruling class, which essentially wanted him as a rubber stamp and basically to say, "Okay, so it's all right that most of my family died in poverty and starvation and you killed my dad; I'll come back and dance to your piping." So he basically got in their way whenever possible.

I feel that he was giving as good as he got, so I'm on his side, being a Royalist anyway. But it can certainly be presented in an unflattering light; he did a lot of things for political advantage which generally moderns don't think is too cool, and he did things to preserve his position, to gain money. He was the one who sold the majority of the titles — so there's an entire layer of English titles, where they are Carolingian creations, specifically done because he was selling them.

Was it him or Charles I who had the famous mistress?

It was Charles II. Barbara Castlemaine is who you're thinking of.

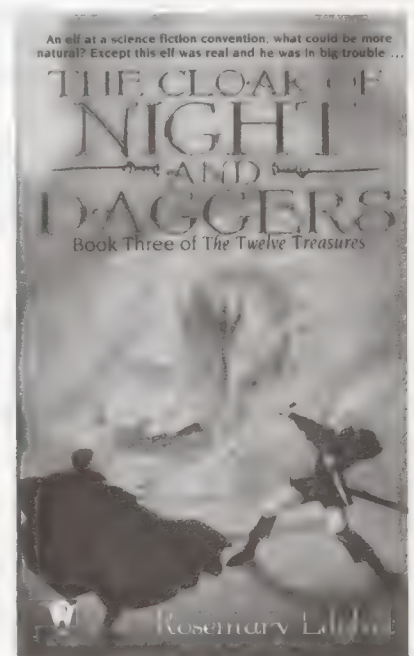
And so she and her children got titles as well, probably without having to buy them.

Certainly without having to buy them; it was part of the benefits package of being a royal mistress.

And his queen was Henrietta?

Yes, she was Henrietta of Austria, I think...

She apparently had much less charm than



Charles did...

She was considered to be extremely plain; he did not, however, divorce or repudiate her, and they remained married until his death. It was certainly Henrietta who was the barren one in the marriage, since Charles fathered bastards the length and breadth of England. And the succession would certainly have been a lot more stable if he had put her aside and married again, but history is not precisely certain whether or not Charles was a devout Catholic.

I thought he was.

No, it's not proven. But if he were Catholic, that would be one explanation for him not divorcing his queen.

It seems as if Charles had some of the political canniness of Elizabeth I, who constantly refused to be pinpointed about anything and used that ambiguity to manipulate political factions all around her.

"It would indeed be very bad of me to forget God when God has been so very good to me." [Presumably this a quote from Elizabeth. — reh] Yet people reading about Elizabeth don't realize — for instance, when they think of England, they think of this enormously powerful Victorian juggernaut — was that in the tim of Elizabeth, England was a tinpot, third-rate country at the edge of everything, with a rotten climate, no particular national product, and no money. It would have been one small mouthful for either Spain or France, and Elizabeth juggled.

Yes, very effectively, with her own marriageability and everything other thing at her disposal.

She was also the first monarch to institute censorship, owing to the fact that printed material was prevalent enough finally, and literacy as well, to require it or to make it possible.

I just read an interesting novel written by the mother of a boy I used to go to Sunday School with, and the novel's contention is that Elizabeth wrote Shakespeare.

This is not unlikely.

It's apparently one of the prevalent theories. She was extraordinarily well-educated, while there's no indication that Shakespeare had any education at all.

Well, you didn't really in those days have to have an education to have an education. And he did have some basic schooling, which meant that he had some dog-Latin and calligraphy and history, and of course, by hanging out in the theater world, you would meet a number of extraordinarily educated people.

But Elizabeth, even by the standards of her own time, was formidably educated. She spoke and wrote five languages, she did some major translations; she wrote exquisite poetry, some of which survives.

Her father was quite a poet.

Yes, he was; he also received the title "Defender of the Faith" from the Pope and didn't give it back, and the monarchs of England bear this title to this day; they're not going to give it back either.

It's always amused me that the faith they're defending is not one they profess.

Well, apparently the arch-primate of England doesn't profess his own faith either, and directly after him saying that he didn't think religious devotion was necessary in a clergyman, I believe lightning struck the church at Canterbury and slagged half the roof.

Apparently God is an editor.

So how do you collaborate with Andre? Do you go visit her? Do you work by mail, or ...

Mostly by phone, and she provided the outline and the pretext and most of the characters, and then I did my usual scene outline and sent it to her and she critiqued it and then I started doing pages and I sent them to her, and she critiqued

those... She writes letters, I don't write letters. I've got a huge file full of letters from her that are wonderful and have all sorts of historical background, and then she's got my phone calls, which isn't completely fair, I suppose. But it's what we do. (And I have to conserve my fingers; I already type in braces.)

She's doing a solid third of the writing, and the idea is **hers**; I put in some stuff, but she said, "Alternate history/regency" and gave me the entire timeline. Then of course I went off and researched Denmark, which does have a regency at that point. It's an important playing piece.

Wasn't Denmark where George III's sister was queen? Or was that Sweden?

I don't know. Madness ran in the Danish royal family also, and...

The king was mad, and the queen was appealing to George III for help, and George was himself going mad and not responding; she ended up in a very untenable position.

Yes, and Prince Christian became the Regent. It's a Protestant monarchy, which makes it a good match for the royal houses of England; it tried to remain neutral throughout the war — England kept going over and shelling its harbor, which they did in 1806 — you don't think that of England, but they did. Napoleon wanted Denmark; it was supplying materials to him, and if it had gone in on his side, Russia would have dropped out of the Triple Alliance. Czar Alexander was supplying a significant amount of troops and cannon to the Triple Alliance. England was paying them to fight. England made cash payments to pressure Germany and Russia throughout the war to keep them in the field. But if Denmark had gone over to the other side, Russia would have withdrawn. I don't know whether it would have switched sides or declared neutrality; it was an incredibly complicated situation. One of my characters is Polish and I have to deal with the fact that Poland has been partitioned three times in approximately a ten-year period.

Well, complicated historical periods do make for wonderful novel backgrounds, because if things aren't known, the author gets to make them up the way they need to be for the plot, and if they are known, they provide lovely justifications for all kinds of actions in the plot.

Yes. The terrible involved interest that everyone had in Denmark actually ended up becoming the central to the book because Henry IX, who's the King of England at the moment — *Henry IX? I hadn't realized...*

Only in my universe. He wants his son Jamie to marry the Princess Stephanie. Princess Stephanie is an actual historical character, but I've taken some liberties with her personality, which I think is only fair as none of the books I consulted were willing to tell me *anything* about her personality.

Then you get to make her up.

But that match brings Denmark in on England's side, keeps Russia in the field, and marries Jamie to a Protestant lower house, which is a major concern for England; it's always been, ever since Henry took England away from the Catholic church, and it's still a concern today when they wouldn't let Charles marry a Catholic on a bet. And they certainly won't let Wills do it either.

It's odd, but England is so focussed on Catholics because of their enormous religious wars, that you could probably go in there as an Eskimo shaman and have a better chance of marrying into the British royal family than as a Catholic.

I admire Queen Elizabeth very much; when I was eight I watched her coronation on TV during a friend's birthday party - there must have been a time delay since it was an afternoon party; I had the coronation coloring book and badgered my parents until they took me to see the movie made of the coronation.

I watched Charles and Di get married, and I was up at 3 a.m. I'm sorry that Elizabeth's children have given her a rotten life.

Well, she's had appalling children, but she's a member of the Hanoverian dynasty, and their children are always an appalling lot who run wild, keep totally unsuitable mistresses, and dabble in political scandal. At least she's avoided the political scandal.

I found an autographed book by Lord Snowden in London and bought a copy for my assistant at the office, Margaret Davis, who's an artist. There was a picture of a medlar, a fruit mentioned in fantasy novels that doesn't grow in America, at least not in California.

In my copious collection of research, I have three books on the flora of the British isles since so much of my stuff is set there. If you're doing something set in a certain period, they're not going to have the New World plants, and plants that they're calling by the same name as we call some of the New World plants will be completely different

However, anything I plant, dies. But I like gardens; I think they're wonderful. I create all sorts of gardens in my mind, just sort of thought gardens, and do all the work on them, but in person, it just wouldn't happen.

Do you do any sewing, any costuming?

I used to, years ago, but since then the only thing I use my hands for really is for typing. I was never particularly good at costuming, but I was enthusiastic.

That's what's important. I've promised to make quasi-medieval costumes for Ellen and Delia, but I need to measure them.

They were wearing these gorgeous mock-Fortuny's at their commitment ceremony. The interesting thing about Fortuny is that he's in the twentieth century, we expect not to lose knowledge, but his process for pleating and dying silk died with him.

Well, judging by a dress my friend Amy's mother wore at her wedding, somebody's coming pretty close.

They keep trying. The process involved a string of glass beads; we know that much; but apparently if he wrote it down, the document hasn't survived. I think it's just strange and bizarre that we can manage to lose knowledge at a point that we're all really focussed on recovering the knowledge from

previous periods.

I think there are a lot of things that pass as technology that are in fact art.

I use the term "craft" for those things. I think that a lot more knowledge is transmitted wordlessly, simply by working with the person who has it, which is certainly how I learned my design, at the studio. There's a very rationalistic, mechanistic current in our society — which actually traces directly to the late Victorian, as so many things do — that believes that if you can't put it down on paper, it doesn't exist. But there's an entire realm of knowledge that isn't going to be put down on paper, and can't be put down on paper, and saying that it doesn't exist simply cuts us off from it, and if a generation passes where it isn't passed down, you've lost it.

Did you find that true in the pagan religious community?

Absolutely. There is absolutely no substitute for being trained in a circle, with a priestess who's already been trained in a circle, all the way back to wherever this starts, and to direct *gnosis*, which is immediate personal knowledge of the deistic forces, however you wish to conceive them.

There are things that can't be written down, things that people just wouldn't think to write down, and correction processes that go on that have to be done one-to-one in a working environment.

We've strayed well off our topic; any final recommendations for anybody trying to break into fantasy fiction?

Learn to live with abuse, and learn to live with being ignored.

What kind of abuse?

People who are not qualified to judge you, saying that your work is rotten; and you've got to develop a strong inner sense of your own writing, because you'll hear so many things about it — that it's wonderful can be just as bad as that it's awful, in certain circumstances; and especially for fantasy writers, I would say, "Read lots and lots of historical nonfiction; you really need to stuff your head with weird truth."

Thank you, eluki.

✧

Novels by eluki bes shahar

TURKISH DELIGHT (as Rosemary Edghill) - St. Martin's Press 1987 (hardcover); Fawcett Books 1989 (pb)

TWO OF A KIND (as Rosemary Edghill) - St. Martin's Press 1988 (hardcover); Fawcett Books 1990 (pb)

THE ILL-BRED BRIDE (as Rosemary Edghill) - St. Martin's Press 1990 (hardcover); Fawcett Books 1991 (pb)

HELLFLOWER (as eluki bes shahar) - DAW Books 1991 (pb)

FLEETING FANCY (as Rosemary Edghill) - St. Martin's Press 1992 (hardcover); Fawcett Books 1993 (pb)

DARKTRADERS (as eluki bes shahar) (Hellflower #2) DAW Books 1992 (pb)

ARCHANGEL BLUES (as eluki bes shahar) (Hellflower #3) - DAW Books February 1993 (pb)

BUTTERFLY AND HELLFLOWER ("Hellflower" omnibus) - SF Book Club, June 1993

SPEAK DAGGERS TO HER (as Rosemary Edghill) (Bast #1) Forge Books May 1994 (hardcover); December 1995 (pb)

THE SWORD OF MAIDEN'S TEARS (as Rosemary Edghill) (Twelve Treasures #1) DAW Books October 1994 (pb)

THE CUP OF MORNING SHADOWS (as Rosemary Edghill) (Twelve Treasures #2) DAW Books December 1995 (pb)

THE BOOK OF MOONS (as Rosemary Edghill) (Bast #2) - Forge Books October 1995 (hardcover); Tor pb 1996

THE BOWL OF NIGHT (as Rosemary Edghill) (Bast #3) Forge Books October 1996 (hardcover)

BELL, BOOK, AND MURDER (Bast omnibus) Forge Books September 1998

SMOKE AND MIRRORS (as eluki bes shahar) X-Men Novel, Boulevard Books, September 1997

THE CLOAK OF NIGHT AND DAGGERS (as Rosemary Edghill) (Twelve Treasures #3) DAW Books (pb) Jan. 1997

THE EMPTY CROWN ("Treasures" omnibus) SF Book Club, August 1997

MET BY MOONLIGHT (as Rosemary Edghill) Pinnacle Books (pb) February 98

TIME'S ARROW BOOK III: THE FUTURE (as eluki bes shahar) X-Men Novel, Berkley Publishing Group, Sept. 1998

WINTERHEART (as eluki bes shahar) X-Men Novel, Boulevard Books, future

A HEART FOR EVERY FATE (with Andre Norton) Tor Books (hardcover), future

For a complete list of short stories, and further info, see website: <http://www.sff.net/people/eluki/index.htm>



ABSINTHE EYES

by Charlene Brusso

Feb 15, 189-

Ward was dead. The letter from his Boston solicitor arrived in the morning, right after breakfast. My face must have given away my disquiet, though I strove to hide it, because Regina noticed and asked if I'd had bad news.

"An old school mate," I explained, shaking my head. That much I was willing to admit. "He's gone and got himself killed in America. Some wretched automobile accident."

"Oh, Andrew, I am sorry." She lay a hand on my sleeve. "Were you and he close?"

"Once," I said, and sipped my tea. The liquid was far too hot and I burned my mouth; punishment for telling the lie. But what else could I do? I certainly couldn't tell her the truth. She would learn it soon enough. The solicitor said he would have Ward's collection — now mine — crated and shipped to England.

There was another note along with the solicitor's letter, this one from a London shipping office. The crate would be sent to Surrey as soon as Customs had cleared the paperwork,

the clerk wrote. I should have it in my possession within the week.

It was too late to stop it now. My only hope was to send the collection, unopened, straight to the Cairo Museum. Perhaps there would be some forgiveness then. At the very least, I hoped to protect my family from it. For myself, I had no such illusions.

I dreamed that night, and the dregs of that broken sleep made it impossible to work the next day. The study was too dark, too close with its ice-rimed windows and heavy mahogany panels, too cold and foreign when set against the reeling images that filled my mind. After more than thirty years, to think the visions could still be so clear: the sun stopping sword-edged rays on fine golden sands, the desert outside of Cairo. Camels, low-minded, ill-tempered beasts, sleepy in the heat, standing as still as the carved stone of the ancient temples around us. And Ward, his face filthy and sweat-tracked, teeth bared and unbelievably white, as he worked to brush away the debris from the find: a doorway set flat into the hillside, sealed with a slab of rock.

"Look here, Andrew," he says, and traces out the symbols in the cartouche, language as old as time, cut deep into the wind-

polished stone. "Kahetenakem," Ward says, his smile stretching wider. "The tomb, old boy! We've really found it!"

"— Andrew?" Regina stood in the doorway, her face vulnerable with concern. For a moment it seemed as if she could read my mind, see the images that haunted my thoughts waking and dreaming. Then she said, "Geoffrey is due home tonight. You haven't forgotten, have you?" and broke the spell.

I had forgotten, of course. But I couldn't tell her the truth.

"Forget my own son coming home from London? No, of course not." I pushed aside the papers that lay scattered across my desk. "I was just getting my notes together for that monograph. The Society wants me to present it next month, and I haven't written a word yet."

This brought a smile — unbelieving, but charming all the same — to my wife's lips. She stepped lightly to my desk and smoothed her hand across my hair.

"I can always tell when you're thinking hard, you know," she said. "Your hair looks like trampled thatch, and your mouth —" She traced my lower lip with a fingertip. "Your mouth gets such a serious set to it."

She took a step back and put her hands on her hips, for all the world like some farmer's wife in the village. "Very well, I won't distract you any further. But fair warning, my dear: In two hours I shall send Humphreys to see that you are decently dressed for dinner. We

don't want Geoff to think his father has turned into an absent-minded old man."

Geoff was in high spirits when he arrived, as were we all. Regina had made certain I was properly dressed, and I had to admit, I was glad of her concern, for time quite slipped away from me that afternoon. Slipped away, for all that it seemed to crawl later in the evening, for not only had Geoff come home, but he had brought a guest with him. A young woman, or rather, one traveling in the guise of a young woman.

Her name was Constance Warwick, a normal enough name, I suppose. It did not suit her. She was dark as a Spaniard, but green-eyed, with a lean, elegant face and smooth black hair which she wore coiled neatly on the back of her neck. Geoff told the story of how they met, in the Egyptian wing at the British Museum.

"She was sketching the bust of Nefertiti, Father — you know the one, with the collar of turquoise and the almond eyes that seem to see right under your skin." Geoff related the story with cheerful amazement. "I have never seen anyone capture the spirit of a piece so thoroughly. It seemed to come alive under her pencil, as if she were born to the style."

Miss Warwick was quick to assure us

that Geoff was exaggerating. "I have no great skill at drawing, Sir Andrew. Your son's heart overrules his judgement," she said, and smiled very prettily, her green eyes sparkling.

Geoff grinned like a schoolboy, and Regina smiled indulgently. I did my best to echo their lightheartedness, but I couldn't help remembering the sketches I made thirty years ago in Kahetenakem's tomb.

Afterwards I paced sleepless in my study. Bessie had closed the draperies against the winter draft, but I opened them again. The fire in the grate danced, at times guttered, as air currents strayed across the hearth, but I could not bear the feeling of being shut in. There was a spirit in me that night which longed for open space, for heat, and bright, searing sun.

I got out the sketches I had made with Ward and spread the pages across my desk: drawings of the stone sarcophagi, three of them, each lying along a wall, like a horseshoe with its open end facing the door. I remembered them clearly, their surfaces covered with carved reliefs, figures of men and gods, and hieroglyphic symbols bright as the pages of an illuminated manuscript, as if they had just been freshly inked.

"Beautiful," Ward says, leaning close to study the portrait of the deceased painted on the coffin opposite the tunnel entrance. It is a still, noble face, a

woman with black hair and eyes of celadon.

"Green as absinthe," Ward breathes, his fingers hovering above the painted face. He spells out the hieroglyphics slowly, his voice barely above a whisper. *"Sekfriti." Akenaketem's sister and bride; his queen and, as some scholars' translations seem to hint, a sorceress as well ...*

"Did you believe she was?" a woman's voice asked suddenly, and I started up from the sketches. It was Miss Warwick, here in the study, facing me across the desk. She still wore the same blue and white dress I had seen her in at dinner, and she looked fresh and entirely at home, despite the late hour.

"Did you believe what your partner read in the glyphs?" she asked me.

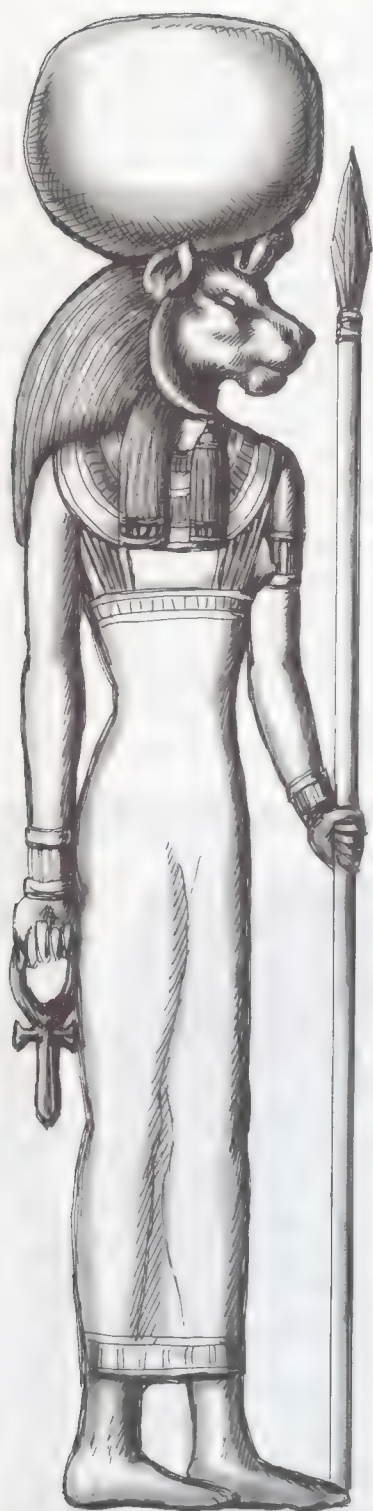
"Ward studied, but he was far from a skilled translator then, Miss —" I hesitated over the name she had used, and she laughed.

"Your friend tried to be a great many things he was not," she said, smiling. "But you, Sir Andrew, you never did. I wonder why? Was it that you lacked the crooked tongue of a liar? Or merely just the courage?"

Fired with sudden anger, I shot to my feet. The uncovered windows sprang open on a biting wind, but what should have been frigid was instead searing, arid, its teeth the grains of sand it carried, cast into my face and



Artwork by April Lee



across the papers on the desk. I threw up my arm to protect my eyes. Through the sandstorm I could see her still standing but changed, in a sleeveless white shift with pleats that fluttered in the wind. She wore a wide collar of gold and jewels about her throat; it covered her breasts like a shield. In her hand she bore a fiery spear, and her head was that of a lioness, with brilliant green eyes and a grinning beast's muzzle.

"Who are you?" I asked witlessly.

"I am *neter*," she roared. "Do you not recognize this aspect? More fool you for that failure!" She raised a human arm, a woman's hand with painted nails and palm, and pointed at the sketches on the desk. "Seek my name in your precious papers and books, then—but do not think it will help you. Your small learning, all your human *sekhem*, it means nothing to my kind. I will have my price where and when I choose, and if I cannot, your *khaibit* will haunt the shadows for the rest of time."

She pointed the tip of her spear at me and I covered my eyes, bracing for the lick of the flames. A flash of light shot past hands and eyelids, and blowing sand scraped my flesh.

The next instant, there was only silence.

I lowered my hands; I was alone. The windows stood closed and securely latched, as I found when I checked them a moment later. Beyond my reflection in the glass I saw the night sky, clear and sharp with stars, the snow on the ground smooth and faintly shining beneath.

A scent of myrrh and spice lingered. There was no sand on the desk or on my clothes, but it seemed as if the phantom wind had shuffled the sketches and brought to the top a drawing of the tomb wall, behind Akenaketem's sarcophagus. A panel of figures filled the page, ancient Egyptian gods with bodies of men and women and heads of beasts: the *neterw*, the gods, in attendance at the tomb. One of the noble group was a woman with the head of a lion, and seeing her picture there on paper, only then could I remember her name: Sekhmet, *neter* of fire, of creativity and destruction. Holding the paper, I felt holes in it—a series of five evenly spaced marks, as if an animal had laid claw to the page.

"Eyes like absinthe," I remembered Ward saying. We drank it often when we were young, as students, and then later in Cairo. Its anise flavor seemed

to cut the heat, and it was fashionable, too, a way to defy death and show scorn to elders who claimed to know better. The Egyptians made a liquor very like it, adjusting the bitter taste of the wormwood with herbs and spices. Who knows how old the recipe is?

A knock at the study door made me reach for the letter opener on the side of the desk. The door opened and Regina looked in.

She cocked an eyebrow; I could imagine what she must make of me, standing there with a letter opener like a dagger in my upraised hand. She was very neat and normal-looking in red velvet dressing gown and slippers, her wheaten hair loose on her shoulders.

"It's a bit late to be answering letters, isn't it?" she asked.

"I'm sorry. I couldn't sleep again." I put down the opener. "It seemed better to work than to lie there tossing and turning, keeping you awake as well."

She smiled and came over to the desk, glanced down at the drawings there. "I haven't seen you look at these in years, Andrew."

"I remembered something while I was working on the monograph, and I wanted to check my old papers."

Regina tilted her head to the side. "Isn't your monograph on pyramid construction techniques?" Before I could make any attempt to answer, before I could think of another lie, she went on.

"Andrew, you've been acting strangely ever since you received the news of your friend's accident. You spoke then as if you barely knew him, but since that moment you've been like a man expecting a demon to appear at his shoulder. I know it's a scholar's prerogative to cultivate a certain air of eccentricity, my dear, but this is becoming rather extreme."

"Regina, I don't want to put you in danger—"

"Nonsense!" she said roundly. "What's it to do with? Did you owe this man something? Does his estate make some kind of claim on you?"

"No, no, nothing like that." I shook my head. "I only wish it were that simple."

"Then what?"

I looked away for a moment, rubbed a hand over my mouth. "Regina, what do you think of Miss Warwick?"

She looked as if she wanted to protest, but paused instead, then said very calmly, "Miss Warwick is very pretty,

very charming, but ... I must admit, I think she is a very convenient sort of acquaintance. Perhaps too convenient, although surely any woman with enough wit to capture Geoff's fancy as she's done, should also know he cannot make her wealthy, nor can he make her anything more glamorous than a scholar's wife. And when I look at her, I see ... I don't know, Andrew. Perhaps it's just a mother's territorial nature to feel this way." Regina pulled up the chair beside the desk and took a seat. "What do you think about her?"

I sank back into my chair. "If I tell you, you will think me mad."

"I swear on my grandfather's Orders, I will not." She smiled briefly, then leaned forward and lay her hand on mine. "Tell me."

So finally, after thirty years, I told her about Ward and me, how we saw ourselves as great explorers; how we paid off a family of tomb robbers to show us the location of an unopened chamber (no doubt they knew of many others, and had been systematically working their way through them over the years); how we identified the pharaoh's cartouche and broke into his tomb, and found it full of rich funeral goods and the three great stone sarcophagi; how we managed to carry out most of the artifacts, and left the coffins for last; and how the four diggers we had hired to help us were buried when the roof collapsed as we struggled to haul out Akenaketem's sarcophagus.

"Ward was nearly caught in the fall. A great cloud of dust and grit came pouring out of the tunnel mouth with a hollow roar. I ran to look and found Ward just inside the entrance, hugging the tunnel wall with an arm curled over his head for protection. He was clutching something to his chest. I had a glimpse of gold shining in the dusty air, then he grabbed my arm and shouted for me to fetch a shovel.

"We'll dig them out," he said. But when I looked down the tunnel, all I could see was a wall of rubble. 'Dig them out? They couldn't possibly still be alive after that!' I told him. And Ward said, 'Not the workers, you fool! The mummies!'"

I had to stop there, my breathing uneven with emotion. Regina was quiet, patiently waiting for me to regain my self-control and finish. There wasn't much more to it. Ward and I had broken ranks after that episode. So far as I knew, he had done a little more dig-

ging, spent some time in India after that, and finally he'd gone to America to teach at one of their universities. After that, I'd heard nothing from him until the letter about his death.

Next, in as plain language as I could manage, I told her of Miss Warwick's visit and amazing transformation. Afterwards I could not look at Regina; I waited for her to speak.

Her initial reaction was not what I expected.

"You drank absinthe?" she asked.

I stared at her.

"Well," she said, smiling, "it's just not something I'd ever pictured you doing."

I couldn't help the nervous laugh. It grew and grew, almost hysterical, until I lost my breath and had to stop. "I am sorry to tell you this, my dear," I said, wiping my eyes, "but I was not always the stolid old professor you see here before you."

She laughed. "I know that, or I would never have wed you. But what you really want to know is what I think about this ... apparition you saw tonight, isn't it?"

I ran a hand over my thinning hair. "I know I have no proof, 'Gina, but believe me —"

"Oh, I do. I do believe you. You have not had absinthe for years, nor do you consume any other spirits in great enough quantity for me to think you imagined something like that. The question is, what does this woman — or goddess, if you prefer — mean to do?"

"She as much as admitted that she'd killed Ward. Surely she means the same fate for me."

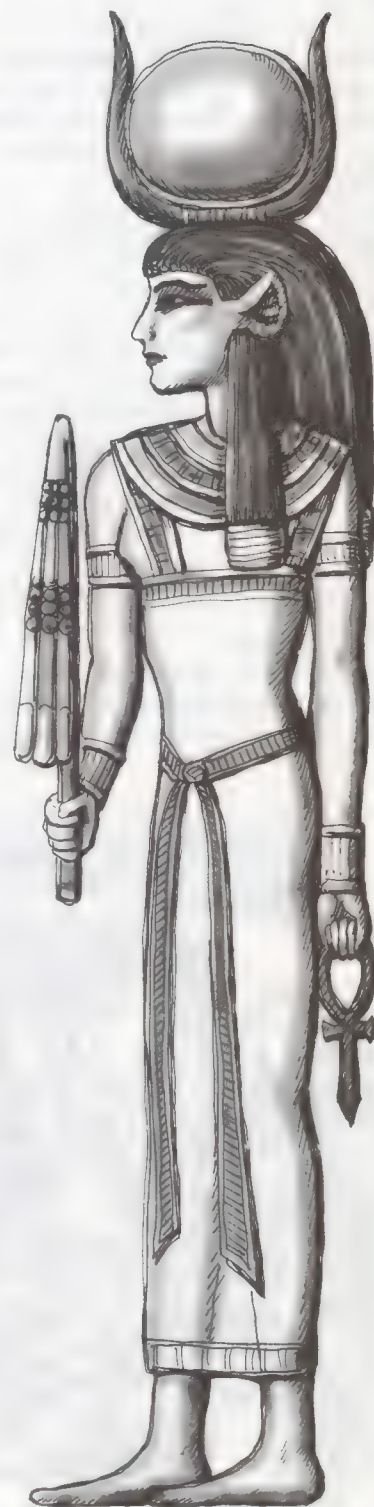
"But if she did, why did she not kill you here and now, when you were alone with her here in the study? It does not make sense, Andrew. Is she waiting for something — a full moon, a new moon, the proper planets in alignment?"

"Regina —"

"I'm not joking, Andrew. If we accept the fact that Egyptian goddesses are running about England threatening perfectly peaceful folk, then we must consider all the baggage that comes with it. In any case," she said, rising swiftly from her chair, "I know the first thing we must do."

"What?"

"We must confront Miss Warwick," my wife said, stopping only to snatch up the fireplace poker as she crossed to the door. "Pick up a candle and follow



me."

Too bemused to question her bravado, I quickly took a candle from the desk and trailed after her.

Miss Warwick was not in her room. The covers had been turned down, but it appeared no head had rested on the pillow for even a moment, and the fire had burned out long ago.

"It doesn't look as if she was ever here," I said, shaking my head.

Regina pulled out a few dresser drawers, wrenched open the door of the wardrobe. "Her things are gone. Now what could she — My God, Andrew — Geoffrey!"

She whirled and ran from the room. I trailed her somewhat less spryly, cupping the candle flame to keep it alive.

"Regina, wait! Be careful!"

"Oh, you can be sure of that!" She stopped short of Geoff's door by a few paces and grabbed my hand. "Andrew, you must promise me something. Whatever you see, whatever happens, you must trust me. Promise me that." Her hazel eyes were wide and serious, and her hand tightened on my mine almost painfully.

"Gina, what are you talking about?"

"Just promise. You must, or I can do nothing to help."

"But you're not making any sense —"

She gave a barking laugh. "Not making sense? And you an Egyptologist!"

Then she pushed open Geoff's door.

Brilliant light filled my eyes, and there was a scent of sweat, of wine and spice and roasted meat, all the aromas of the Cairo bazaar. Voices, guttural and quick, flew about as vendors shouted the quality of their wares. From somewhere ahead came the sound of chanting and women's voices raised in song. A camel snorted as I bumped into it, and I dropped the candlestick. I felt the beast's rough hide with outstretched hands as I struggled to get my bearings, blinking watery eyes, trying desperately to see through the sun's blinding glare.

A new voice, male, raised a high, warbling cry, as I have heard the Bedou call to one another, and other voices picked up the ululation. The camel grunted as I found its neck and wrapped my arms around it for an anchor against the sheer outrageous oddity of the place. On my other side a woman cursed in fluent Arabic, swearing by ancient Aten, the solar disk, rather than Allah; the voice was that of my own dear Regina.

"Come on, Andrew, don't dawdle with that evil-smelling creature. This way, if you please."

A hand on my elbow drew me along. I squinted to see. A moist, green smell filled the air. Underlying the crowd noise, I heard the murmur of water.

Ahead, the sun sparkled along the muddy lapis surface of the Nile. Cheering crowds lined its banks and waved painted banners.

"There she is, the jackal-hearted whore — excuse me, dear. Do you see her on that ceremonial barge there, upstream of us?" Regina pointed ahead, and only then did I see how she had been altered along with our surroundings. As Miss Warwick had appeared earlier, Regina wore a clinging white shift with knife-edged pleats. Her hair was oiled and combed straight back, and on her head rested a crown which sported the polished horns of a beast of burden. Below that —

"Gina, your ears!"

They had changed to those of a cow. She flicked them back and up, and bared her teeth; it was clearly not meant to be a mortal smile.

"I know this is a shock, Andrew, but do try to keep up. Come now, hold my hand tightly."

She carried a flail in her other hand, such as peasant women used to beat the grain heads from their stalks. In the next instant I was running with her as she shouldered into the crowd. The people fell back, parting for her advance with cries of surprise and sudden ecstatic praise.

"Hathor! Hathor!" the chant rose, ringing around us. Regina pulled me down



to the muddy riverbank, stepped out and moved lightly across the surface of the water, heading for the barge. I tried to swallow my panic. The river sucked at the heels of my slippers, but Regina did not slow or even look back.

A trio of guards, muscular young men in loincloths, with topknots sprouting from the middle of shaved skulls, stood with their spears raised, poised to throw. I saw their arms snap forward, the spears flying at us. Regina merely waved her flail in the air, and the spears flew wide. A heartbeat later we were on the broad, flat deck, the unarmed spearmen cowering away from us.

"Where is the false goddess who claims illegal sacrifice?" Regina shouted, her voice resounding like thunder. The crowds on the riverbank fell silent.

Banners and palm branches fluttered around a low, wide throne where Sekhmet reclined shamelessly, one leg over the arm of the seat, a skewer of charcoaled meat chunks in her hand. Her spear stood leaning on the back of the throne. As we approached, she plucked a piece of meat with dainty human fingers and popped it into her lion's maw, showing large, yellow fangs.

"You have no place here, sister," the lioness purred. "Unless you have come to witness a handfasting."

"I will drink no wedding cup to celebrate the handfasting of a petty and low thief," Regina said in a tone that chilled my heart.

"Thief, am I?" Sekhmet swung her foot idly and gave a feline smirk. "I merely follow your example. You said I might choose a consort where and when I would, and so I have done. Or are we finally done with that old bargain?" She sat up a little more alertly. "Is that it, great Hathor? Shall we finally say the treaty between us is void and return to more exciting ways?"

"You have already broken it, little sister." Regina looked back at me. "She has Geoffrey somewhere belowdecks, Andrew. Go and find him, while I deal with her."

I hesitated. The door to the barge's interior was nearly equidistant between the two women. Sekhmet rose to her feet, baring her large and powerful-looking teeth.

"Dare the entrance, man, and you will find yourself facing Anubis in the shadowlands of Duat."

"Ignore her, Andrew," my wife said. "He knows to fear me, and rightly so," Sekhmet laughed with a roar of humor. "Thirty years ago, Sir Andrew, you and another proud wretch dared to breach a royal tomb. I let him live longer than he deserved. Defy me now, and I will see that your fate catches you much more swiftly."

In that instant, I am not embarrassed to say, I was frozen with fear. I dare any other man in my place to say he would be any braver than I.

Hathor/Regina put a hand on my shoulder and leaned close to my face. I had to tear my gaze from the sight of her ears and look into her eyes.

"Andrew, listen to me. Do you remember what I asked you before?" Hazel irises shone with tiny flecks of gold and green — not the poisonously bright shade of absinthe in the lion's eyes, but a good, honest green. Eyes I could trust.

Feeling half foolish, half knightly, I caught up her hand and pressed a kiss to it, then ran as hard as I could in slippers and old velvet dressing gown for the hatchway.

Sekhmet leaped. I saw her shadow cross the hatch just before I ducked through and down the stairs. Something hit the deck with a heavy thud, followed by scratching as of claws on the soft wood. I forced myself to go on.

Below the deck was a large state-room, the floor covered in rich carpets, decorated with tasseled pillows and low tables. Geoff lay asleep among the cushions, still in his nightshirt, his feet bare. Overhead, the wood creaked and complained under the stress of a battle I could scarcely imagine.

"Geoff —" I grabbed his shoulder and tried to wake him, but he lay as if drugged — or bespelled; after everything else that had happened, I suddenly had no difficulty believing in magic. I pulled him upright, stooped and hauled him over my shoulder. Muscles complained in my back and legs as I fought to stand inside the rocking boat. Once I was certain of my balance, I made my way across the cabin to the stairs.

The furious noises above stopped abruptly when I was only a few steps from the top of the stairs and the open hatchway, high enough to see the sky had gone black. The air was thin and bitterly cold. The only light came from the fiery spear in Sekhmet's hand, and the luminous solar disk perched be-

tween the curved horns on Regina/Hathor's crown.

Sekhmet drew back, twisted, and drove her spear down, aiming at Regina's breast. I cried out, just as Regina/Hathor swung her flail and deflected the speartip. The leather straps of the flail whipped around the spear haft and with a flick of her arm the cow-eared goddess stripped the weapon from her opponent's hands. The spear sliced through the night, burning like a comet until distance quenched its glow. Only the miniature sun on Hathor's crown lit the scene now, but it seemed as bright as day.

Sekhmet bowed low to her sister goddess.

"You bow as if you expect to earn mercy by it," Regina/Hathor said dryly.

"I expect only fairness," Sekhmet said, her eyes averted. "You have won all. I admit my fault. Surely you can find forgiveness for such a small transgression."

Regina/Hathor slapped the handle of her flail against her palm. I came up the last few steps. She glanced my way and gave me a soft smile before she returned a harder gaze to Sekhmet, slapping the flail into her palm again.

"You steal my son away from my own house, and you dare to call it a 'small transgression'?"

Sekhmet's lip curled in a sneer. "If you would place a halfbreed godling at higher value than a goddess, you do not deserve the title."

Regina/Hathor's face remained calm, but her voice was harsh. "You are too proud, sister."

"Do I seem so to you? Perhaps that is because you have been wallowing with animals for so long, you have forgotten what it means to be an Immortal."

"No, sister. I fear you have been alone for so long, you have forgotten. Remember that in your exile."

"You cannot!" Sekhmet surged forward, suddenly contrite, her hands outstretched. "We are sisters!"

"No longer." Regina/Hathor waved her back with the flail. "No. Now I say we are separate, and you are banished."

She swept her arm back and flung the flail into the air, clapping hands above her head with a high-pitched cry. Sekhmet cowered under the force of that voice, a sound so powerful it drove me to my knees, hugging Geoff's body against me. The flail went up and up, reached the top of its arc. From its

strands, sparks fell, sizzling on Sekhmet's skin. She threw her head back and roared, sparks igniting her until she was a ball of light that flared up once, then shrank away to nothing.

As before, I felt no shift underfoot, but in the next instant I was on my knees in Geoffrey's room. His weight dragged at me, and it took every ounce of will I had to get him to his bed.

Regina was close by, human again, her hair tousled, her face drawn. I sat down on Geoff's bed and mopped my brow with my sleeve; my heart beat rapidly from exertion and excitement and fear.

Regina pressed my hand, then bent over Geoff's sleeping form. She pulled open the collar of his nightshirt and exposed a necklace braided with bits of some plant, woody stems and dry, brittle leaves. Wrinkling her nose, Regina took the necklace in her hands and wrenched it apart. The air filled with a sharp, dusty smell, like a room shut up for too long, or a tomb. The necklace crumbled to dust in her hands, disappeared, but its odd odor lingered.

"Wormwood," Regina said, and shook her head. "Our Miss Warwick was clever, but not very creative." Geoff murmured in his sleep and rolled over, wrapping an arm around his pillow. Regina brushed at the hair that fell across his forehead. "He will sleep and wake with no ill effects from this night's business." She looked at me. "What about you, Andrew?"

"I ... Physically, I am still whole. For the rest of it ... 'Gina, I don't suppose there's any way to wake and discover this has all been a very strange dream?"

She laughed, not entirely with humor. "Would you rather it were?"

I hesitated, then shook my head. "No. No, I wouldn't. I just — I'm sorry, but I can't help feeling as if I'll be turned into a frog, or a pillar of salt or some such, at any minute here. I mean, if you are a goddess, then you ... well, you must admit, it's a bit difficult to accept, even after I've had the proof."

She pursed her lips. "If you wish, I can make you forget it happened. Just as Geoff will have no memory of Miss Warwick when he awakens tomorrow."

"No, I don't want that either. It's all a bit sudden, that's all. I mean, after all this time, to learn that — Dash it all, woman — Hathor? — I don't even know how to address you. Your Highness? 'Your Holiness' might be logical, I suppose, but it just doesn't seem, well,

proper."

She laid a hand on my arm. "Then will you call me 'wife', and be satisfied?"

"Wife?" I couldn't help staring at her.

"Or Regina. I will gladly answer to either one." She caught hold of my hands and pulled; I came to my feet, still too befuddled to resist. "Really, Andrew, you're behaving as if I'd just announced I was keeping a trio of lovers hidden away in the attics. There is nothing to worry about. Think of it as being married to a very distant relative of the Royal Family."

That startled a weak laugh out of me. I followed her out of the room, pulling the door behind us so we wouldn't disturb Geoff. "Queen Regina? It does



have a certain ring to it, doesn't it?"

She smiled broadly. "Someday I'll tell you how I managed to be born to that name. Now come, you look tired. And I am ready to drop. We should try and get some rest before we draw the final curtain on this adventure."

"But if Miss Warwick — Sekhmet — is truly banished, what else can there possibly be to do?"

"There was a package for you today from in London: the artifacts from the tomb you and Ward excavated."

"Oh Lord, 'Gina, I can't take those things! Four men died when that ceiling collapsed."

"The blood price has been paid with Ward's death," Regina said. "More than paid."

"Is it really that simple?"

"Yes, it is," she said, in a tone that left no doubt in my mind. Then she smiled. "And if anyone bothers you about it

again, I promise you, they'll have to answer to me."

I shook my head. "All this time I've been struggling to translate hieroglyphics you could have read as easily as I read the newspapers!"

"And you've done a fine job of it too, Andrew. It was your scholarly zeal that drew me to you from the first, you know. I never dared deprive you of the satisfaction of solving such puzzles." She kissed me on the cheek and wrapped her arm around my waist. "Now what shall you do with the artifacts?"

"I have an idea," I mused aloud as we walked together down the corridor. "The Egyptian Hall in the British Museum does need some new exhibits. As I recall, their displays are notably weak in depictions of Hathor."

"And Sekhmet?" Regina asked, cocking an eyebrow.

"And Sekhmet too," I agreed. "But I think we can put things to right now."



CHARLENE BRUSSO writes: "My background is somewhat ... diverse. I've worked as an archaeologist, an astronomer, a baker, a museum curator's assistant, a janitor, a physicist, a tutor, and a scientific programmer. I started writing stories in fifth grade and have pretty much been writing ever since, though things didn't become serious until 1989, when I participated in a summer writing workshop at U.Mass, Lowell.

Right now I'm finishing up my first novel (SF adventure). In the meantime, I review SF & fantasy for *The Middlesex News* (a local newspaper), and I also write or review for *Aboriginal SF*, *The Thirteenth Moon*, *Publishers Weekly*, *InQuest*, and *Brutarian* magazines.

'Absinthe Eyes' is my second 'pro' sale. My short story 'The Salute' appeared in the Spring '96 issue of *Aboriginal SF* and earned a couple of Nebula recommendations. I've also had a few stories published in small-press and e-zines, but nothing earth-shattering, to my chagrin ..."

APRIL LEE is a freelance illustrator and computer game animator who has worked on CD-ROM games, collectible card games, and books and magazines. Her art has won awards at WorldCon and Westercon art shows. She holds degrees in Illustration from Art Center College of Design, in English literature from Mt. Holyoke College and in History from Oxford University, England.

Translations from the Editorial

by Marion Zimmer Bradley

I originally wrote a version of this article in the early 1970's. Going back to it now, I realize that while a lot of the things mentioned in it haven't changed, quite a few of them have; and I've managed to achieve most of the ambitions I had then on how to treat writers.

For the past twenty years — since 1951 or thereabouts — I have been earning my living as a professional free-lance writer and speculating about the greener pastures on the other side of the desk. That is, I've been wondering what it would be like to be on the dishing-out end, instead of the receiving end, of those rejection slips, editorial requests for rewrites, blue-penciling, and so forth.

Naturally, I told myself, if I were an editor, I would always level with my writers, I would never, *never* use weasel words such as "This rejection implies no lack of merit in your story..." or "This isn't quite right for us..." I would faithfully read the slush pile, try hard to discover new writers instead of going all-out for big names, make my editorial reports promptly, and send out all checks by return mail.

I do faithfully read the slush pile, and when I say that a story is a perfectly good story but just not right for us, I mean it. I have about thirty other things to say about why I'm not buying a story for use when the story isn't good. I have tried hard first with SWORD & SORCERESS and now with Marion Zimmer Bradley's FANTASY Magazine to discover new writers — with a fair amount of success. And my secretary processes contracts and checks with a degree of promptness probably unequaled in the industry.

Well, I've recently survived an eleven-month stretch as Features Editor for a magazine which shall be nameless (there are still laws of libel in the country) and, as I understand that almost all free-lance writers daydream of some day being on the other side of the desk, a brief rundown of my safari through slush-pile country (with blue pencil and eye drops) may help other dreamers to learn the facts of life — i.e., that when the editor starts making with the weasel words, it's just her instincts for survival doing their thing. (Of course, if her instincts for survival were in good shape she would never have wanted to be an editor...)

The first resolve to go was the one about the slush pile — probably because, for my sins, I was working for an old-time publisher, one of these chaps who brags that he used to edit a string of twenty-four pulps. He used to pay his editors

fifteen dollars a week, and he never really believed that brains come any higher than that. He bragged that he got by with paying the lowest rates in the business, and as a result the manuscript mailbag is *all* slush pile — when I called respectable agents and asked for material, the kindly ones said "I'm sorry, we have nothing suitable just now." This was my first experience with the Fine Art of Editorial Translation: I soon found out that what they meant was "I'm sorry, but anyone good enough to be a client of ours is going to have higher rates than you're paying." The unkindly ones usually didn't need translation — their response was usually some variant of "Are you for real? Drop dead!"

So, in order to make up each month's issues I was thrown back on the slush pile — the manuscripts sent in by naive amateurs who were content to see their name in print, no matter how low the pay; by semi-professionals who couldn't yet command good rates but hoped to pile up enough "sold" wordage to interest a good agent; and by the hopeless duds. I could either find enough wordage in this stuff for each successive issue, or I could write the issue myself.

I began my stint as an editor by thinking of myself as a pearl-diver, trying to fish up priceless neglected gems out of the mud and slush. After a couple of months I began to realize what was meant by the slang usage of "pearl diver" — the fellow who fishes in the greasy dishwater at the local hash house — and to know that my chances of finding a pearl were just about like his! It was never a question of finding the best manuscripts — the publisher went out and made special arrangements, blackmailing or conning old friends for two or three "lead" articles every month. The rest was up to me, and to the other underpaid editor of the magazine, to produce from the slush pile. Somehow, I had to fish out the least worst, and if by chance I found a halfway literate article in the pile to nurture the sender like a precious gem, until he or she discovered that most magazines paid more than \$15 for a full-page article.

So, unless you are dealing with a top-flight magazine which pays good rates, if you are still submitting to the slush-pile of the magazines which buy non-agented material, I offer from my experience some Translations from the Editorialese... i.e. when the editor writes you a note about your submission, this is probably what she means.

"Of course, your manuscript needs some heavy editing..." Translation: please, *please* learn to spell, or else how to use a dictionary?

"Your story still needs a little work..." Translation: it's got

to be rewritten from beginning to end before I'd have nerve enough to put it into the layout and if you don't do it I'll have to.

"I'd like to hold this a few days for a final decision." Translation: it's really pretty bad, but if nothing else that's better comes in before the deadline, I'll have to use it, good or bad.

"We hoped to use this, but unfortunately we can't make a spot for it in the current issue." Translation: I was afraid I'd be stuck with this, but fortunately something else came in. (Or, Alternate Translation: the basic idea is okay but I haven't the time to rewrite it from beginning to end, or the *chutzpah* to ask you to do it for the rates we pay.)

"Your approach to the subject is interesting and original, but I'm afraid our readership would demand a little more documentation...." Translation: I never heard such a crazy idea in my life but I'll take a chance if you'll blame it on some standard reference, expert, or Big Name, preferably one we can quote in large type.

"Using such an original approach to your subject may shock our more conventional readership, but we feel that a little controversy is wholesome. I feel, however, that we must give equal time..." Translation: we're both crazy, but the publisher says I have to take you apart in the next issue, under a pen name, to avoid infuriating the old fools who will write in slamming anything new we dare to print.

"This material does not exactly meet our editorial requirements..." Translation: Holy smoke, next time *read* the issue! We don't use epic poetry.

I still have this problem in spades. I get manuscripts from people who have not only not read my magazine, but have obviously not even read my guidelines. I find this an annoying waste of my time and their postage.

"This particular item does not exactly meet our requirements just now, but we really hope you'll try us again..." Translation: "Holy Moses, you can write! Alas, we just can't use an article on the warehouses of Lost Atlantis, no matter how funny and delightful it is, but please, please send us something we can use..."

"All our material is staff-written and we are not considering outside contributions at this time." Translation: We don't buy hard-core porno; we don't buy kiddie stories; we don't buy material hand-written in pink magic marker; we don't buy the work of illiterate amateurs who don't know their trade. I'm too busy, and you're too hopeless, for me to attempt to educate you, Get lost.

"I have taken the liberty of rearranging and editing your article slightly..." Translation: I had to rewrite the whole thing from end to end. If you look at your manuscript and then at what I did with it, you might learn something; next time your pride, and my sweat, can both be spared.

It is my policy not to rewrite a story without the author's participation. Our contract says that we can do rewriting, but we try to keep it to minor grammatical and stylistic changes.

I also developed, due to the publisher's permanent tight-money policy, and his firm belief that anything over a cent a word was rank inflationary nonsense, a set of phrases in editorialese for dealing with those of my writers who were not simply so pleased to see their names in print that they

took each check as a pleasant surprise. For instance, the most useful, necessary and overworked phrase in my little Editorial Phrase Book became "in due course." As in, of course, "payment will be sent in due course" or "We'll have a decision on this in due course." The translation, it hardly needs saying, was simply editorialese for *whenever I get around to it*.

There were others. "Payment will reach you when it has been processed through the accounting department." Translation: One of us, in the constant rush, forgot to put through a voucher for the word-count and check, and the whole thing has to be gone through again.

"Payment will be forthcoming very soon now" means we'll pay you when we hear from your lawyers or when you threaten to move into the office to sleep after you've been evicted.

"We have altered our policy to payment upon publication," means you'll get a check unless we decide to fold the magazine before we got around to using your story.

"Payment is by arrangement only" means we can't pay you, and we suggest you don't bother sending us anything more unless you don't need the money and just write for the fun of seeing your name in print. It's the professionals-keep-out of the publishing business.

Don't think I enjoyed learning to write in editorialese. Every phrase added to my Handy Notebook meant another illusion dropped. As I wrote in a rare moment of honesty to one of the equally rare literate professionals who roosted — briefly — in our pages before giving up on us, "Look, friend; I'd love to have all the good material from respectable agents to choose from; I'd like to pay three to five cents a word, and I'd like to send out the checks on acceptance. But I'm not really running the magazine at all, I just work here, like anybody else."

Now that I am running the magazine, I do get good material, I pay three to ten cents a word, and I send checks on acceptance. It's a dream come true.

In the course of my eleven months on the magazine, I also learned to translate what was said to me by the publisher. I asked, for instance, about buying art for the magazine, and I was told "We make special arrangements for that." Translation, as I soon found out: we got all our art from a cold-type book, which is why it looks exactly like all the other art in all our other magazines. Now and then, for a change, the publisher would use some original artwork "reprinted by popular demand." Translation: he had a four-foot stack of old Finlay, Lawrence, etc., pen-and-ink drawings left over from use in science fiction pulps back in the forties, which he'd bought up for a couple of bucks apiece and used eight or nine times each.

"We hope to develop a consistent editorial point of view, by having a great deal of our material staff written." Translation: We can't pay decent free-lance rates, you poor dope; you're going to have to write all the features yourself so I can be sure of getting my full money's worth for your salary.

"You can take the work home, and do it at your leisure." Translation: We're short of desk space around here, and I'm too stingy to put in another one for you."

It's not that I don't have a desk, but by now I prefer to work at the kitchen or dining room table.

* *

And, of course, there was the most frightful phrase in any publisher's Handy Notebook. If you hear it more than three or four times, and once you learn to translate it, it's bound to drive you right out of the editorial profession, and right back to your own free-lance typewriter. It goes like this:

"Listen, dear, we're going to press tonight, and we're just a little short for the issue..."

And of course the translation is:

"There's nothing but crud in the slush pile, so please let me have a nine-thousand-word lead article, all copy-edited and blurbed, on a nice, popular, controversial topic — but not too controversial — by five o'clock this afternoon. Oh, yes, and be sure it has a nice short snappy title we can slug in on the cover, and maybe a couple of illustrations or photographs.... What the hell do you *mean* it's short notice? What the hell am I paying you for?"

We actually did have a variation on this situation once (issue 24) when the cover artwork didn't come in on time. Rachel showed Lisa some slides of art we could get for the cover and asked her to write

a story to go with one of the pictures. Between midnight and 3 a.m. the next two nights, Lisa wrote "Ice Princess." When she turned it in, Rachel blinked at her in surprise and said something along the lines of "I wasn't really serious; I didn't think you could do it."

[I wasn't shocked, just terribly impressed with Lisa's speed, and how late she'd stayed up to write it. -- reh]

Lisa promptly shot back, "Tough, you're buying this, and you're paying me ten cents a word." So she got ten cents a word and her first cover story (her second, issue 30, was done in our normal fashion where the story is written first and then the artist does the cover), and the story was later reprinted in a fantasy anthology in England. A staff that can work well under pressure is a valuable asset, but you don't want to stress them out any more than absolutely necessary. The occasional challenge is one thing; staff burnout is quite another.

I really enjoy having my own magazine: being able to run it the way I want to and to treat writers the way I always wanted to be treated. There's saying in the writing business that you can't pay back the people who helped you when you were starting, so you pay forward. But with my magazine, in a way, I'm doing both.

It's midnight.

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Blood Evidence

by Barbara E. Tarbox

He came home in an agony of panic, calling for me, sliding from his lathered mare as I ran from the chicken pen; my apron full of grain, my heart full of dread.

He spoke in a tumble of words of how she had bumped against him in the trap of the market crowd, knocking him to the littered cobbles — how he had rolled away and bolted when she tried to lay shimmering hands on his face as though to clear away dirt.

Even as he told his tale, his eyes kept returning to the path he had taken, the path she would follow.

There was little time and much to do. I sent him into the cottage, bade him drink the amber liquid I kept safe in a dark jar.

He did not question.

He is a good boy.

I have waited alone, as I must. I pull my shawl tighter as she emerges from the deepening shadows of the woods, but wool cannot help. The chill in my blood has nothing to do the evening air and only grows worse as I watch her. She moves with a grace beyond anything purely human, the heavy links of her armor flowing with her as easily as silks on the smooth limbs of a courtesan. I feel weak and old by comparison, but I must face her. There is no other choice.

I have spent most of my life studying her kind. It is my duty to my Guild — some would say it is my obsession — yet I have never before encountered

one of the Ancient Sorcerers' Guardians. They are few, and mix little with the world. I have seen paintings, woodcuts, yes; but they are from generations long gone and have not prepared me.

She is beautiful.

More beautiful than my son's terror-distorted tale could convey — more beautiful than I could have imagined. I realize now the force of will it took for a boy of barely nineteen years to flee her, and I love him more, if that is possible, than I ever have before.

Thanks to the gods of mountain and woodland for giving him the strength!

Thanks also to the years of fear I tended in his heart like the bitter herbs of my garden.

Had he not run, had her touch lingered ...

But she is beautiful. More than beautiful — the sight beyond my eyes sees her in the colors of sunlight on snow. Perhaps the Dark Magic of the Old Ones has lost its hold, perhaps she is ...
No.

She has left a horse tethered in the pools of night beneath the trees. I can feel its anxiety at being alone where every snapping twig might be the footstep of a predator. I touch its timid mind to assure it the woods are tame here, but I cannot linger to fight back the fanged things of its imagination.

I have my own danger to attend.

Her easy strides consume the distance between us. When my mother was a girl, most of the Guardians were

still so fleet of foot that they scorned the use of horses. That was not so long ago, as the years race. The changes seem to be happening more quickly than in the past. It may be — I hope that it is so — but hope will not save my son.

She stops two paces from me, and I must look up to see her face. As tall as my Gravin she is, perhaps half a hand more. She gazes down, and her eyes are not the lizard yellow I expect from reports by past Journal Keepers. They are the brown of fresh-hulled chestnuts and large beneath thin brows.

"You are the mother of my Chosen?" she asks.

"Gravin is my son."

She settles back on her heels, but there is still the tension of a half-drawn bow in her stance. "You are a Woman of Power. Do you intend to contest my claim?"

"Contest? No."

"That is well." She smiles and I am drawn to her; moth to torch; spun into a whirlpool of light. Weightless, I am, and giddy with the certainty that everything is right with Creation. If only Gravin could be with me to feel this, if only my son could —

My son.

Cold shame shocks my senses back to me. All my years of study, and I am not immune to her net of magic. But I am not a man, it cannot entangle me for long.

She is still smiling, the smile now small and private. "Was that so ter-

rible?" she asks, her voice like a warm breeze through a field of lavender. "Is that what you fear?"

Her manner does not fit her mission. I must not let myself be lulled into a mistake. "My fear is for the life of my son. You have only proven that he would be defenseless against you, but to contest ... I have no way to best you in a battle for him. I cannot meet your magic."

"That is not what I heard in the villages and fields as far as a week's travel from this place."

There is no accusation of falsehood in her voice, and I try to feel the emotion behind her words, to gauge the true attitude of my adversary. It is hard; my talents are attuned to natural creatures, the beasts and birds. There is little left of those in the one before me.

Perhaps ...

No.

I strain to my limit to catch a trace of her thoughts, then try again when I cannot believe what I have glimpsed. *Admiration.* Admiration for the power that runs in the blood of my Guild, my family — my son. The pull of ancient linkages, like calling like. I damn the power silently for marking my son as prey. Damn it even as I dig my toes into the soft earth to be closer to its source.

"They are simple people, hereabouts," I reply, "with little learning, easily impressed. There will be legends grown from your visit long before the fields are ready for harvest."

She presses the tips of her long-nailed fingers together. Talons, I try to think, but it is not true. Not talons. Nails. Strong, thick, dangerous; but nails. Perhaps this is the one, perhaps this is the time.

No.

Her hands flex, but the tapered ends stay together. "My magic is limited to my Chosen. I think you know that. A Keeper of Records would know such things."

There is a deference in her words for the knowledge I hold. Few humans outside the Guild know the history of her kind; only Journal Keepers know the whole truth of it. But the Guardians know — she knows — and the shared rarity forms a loop of awkward intimacy around us.

I push the feeling aside with words of cold formality. "I know that where your Chosen is concerned, there is no stronger magic."

She nods, and the strands of hair that

curl from beneath her helmet move like fire in the dying sun. "They gave us that much."

Old anger wells high within me and spills over into sickness. "They gave only what it benefited them to give. They gave what would make you deadly protectors of their caves and treasures — precious little compared to what they took."

Her head tips slightly but her sculpted face shows nothing. Could I read the features of a hawk? But she is not a hawk, though the Sorcerers so long dead under the weight of their own evil may have used something of a hunting bird in their infernal

tinkerings.

She is — No, she is not a woman. I must not let myself forget.

I must not.

She looks past me, scanning my clearing. I know she is seeking Gravin, feeling for him as I would search for a candle in the dark.

Her sweep circles back to me. "Your son is here."

She says it softly, as though a gentle tone will lessen the pain of the truth she has spoken. It surprises me that she would give any thought to my feelings and something inside me contracts, whispering from its smallness that I am wrong. I cannot listen. There is too



Artwork by Maurine Starkey

much risk in listening. That she considers the emotions of another, that she is able to consider, is a good sign for the future. But this is now.

This is my son.

"You touched him in the market," I say. "You could find him if three fresh horses had relayed him beyond the hills."

She brushes two fingers from the bridge of her nose to the edge of her helmet in respect. "You do know much."

"Since my son was born, I have waited for the day when one of your kind would come to claim his life."

The edges of her teeth, her not-at-all-pointed teeth, press into her lip and the silence stretches between us like sky with cricket-calls for stars. When she finally speaks, she does not look at me. "I will make him happy. Happier than any man. He will sire a beautiful daughter. A daughter also of your line, a daughter of Power."

"What," I ask, "if he sires a son?"

That hurts her. I can see it in the pinching of her shoulders. Such a frail, human gesture. Perhaps I have taken the wrong way.

No.

"We will ... have another, another child ... before ..."

"Before my son dies?"

She is looking at my cottage. "No ... Yes."

I risk a hand upon her arm. It is a risk; the old Sorcerers created warriors with the striking instincts of vipers; but she only stiffens at the liberty.

"Choose another," I say.

"I cannot. I have chosen your son — your Gravin."

"I do not want my son to die."

"Do you think I do?" Her words blur with her motion and I am face to face with her, hanging from her grip, a straw doll. "Do you? Do you know that my mother mourned my father for twenty years? Twenty years! The strands of magic that bind our Chosen to us run both ways, woman, and they do not break."

Her breath draws in ragged and harsh and her bone-bruising fingers open. The earth jars pain through my uncertain knees but I do not look away from her eyes. There is a chance that I cannot, and I am afraid to try.

I tell her that I did not know. It is the truth. There is no hint in the records that the Guardians are caught by their own webs. I would like to tell her that

I am sorry for her mother's grief but I keep silent. She would not believe me, but it would also be the truth.

I know mourning well.

She turns her head away, the edge of her jaw hard-cut. "He must be Changed. If he is not Changed, his seed will not bear fruit. It is the way it has always been."

"And as soon as he is Changed, his very blood will begin to war against him. He will begin to die."

"He will not know at the beginning. He will look the same, feel the same — better, for a while ..."

"He will know. I have told him, warned him, every day since he was old enough to learn the lesson."

She faces me, her understanding clear. "And so he ran from me in the market."

"And to me for help."

"It is too late."

"Your touch was fleeting," I say. "He is not bound to you."

"But bonded." The words come slowly, separated by the effort of her patience. "You know that is why I can feel him here."

Speaking of Gravin has dissolved the last of her anger. I can sense it, I can see it in the smile that softens just the corners of her mouth. She looks like a young woman in love.

No.

"I feel him here, and yet he is ... He is far away. You have done something to cause this?"

"He sleeps," I say. "A sleep as deep as my arts can produce."

"Why?"

"To spare him pain."

She frowns. The expression does not seem out of place, gods be praised. The Evil that the Ancients left behind is wearing away like a rock in rushing water.

Perhaps ...

No.

Not my son.

"I have seen others Changed," she says. "There is no pain, and when our hearts beat in the same rhythm, he will be happy."

I will be happy. The words are there in her eyes, pulling my heart in a direction it must not go. It would be easier if she was more like the creatures her ancient grandmothers were created to be — easier for me. I dare not allow myself time to weaken. I step aside, as though my presence has ever been a physical obstacle, and point to a rough

square opening in the stone wall of my cottage.

"He is there," I say, "in the bed in which he was born on the Solstice of a summer nineteen years gone. See him, if you will, but only through the window. Do not try to touch him, for the shock would spiral his sleep down to eternity."

She nods and slips across the clearing. I follow as quickly as my common legs can carry me and join her in the faint spill of light from the one candle in the room. She seems to have frozen there; a deity from the reliefs of the temple walls.

He looks like a carved god himself. So still, so handsome; so like his father that pride and loss compete in my heart each time I look at him.

Handsome and young and strong, and I watch her sweeping him with her gaze once, sharply twice.

"What have you done?" she whispers. "What have you done?"

Her fingers, like elegant iron vises over the window ledge, crumble a shower of masonry from between the stones. I know my bones may well be next, but that is a price I accepted when I chose this way.

"I have saved my son."

"Saved?"

The golden color behind her pale skin has faded, leaving an alabaster mask. Only the dark eyes remain alive, fixed on the worn blanket draped across his loins, and on the deep red stain which has stopped its spread at its own drying borders.

"I spoke the truth when I said I would not contest your claim," I say, and step back from the window, hoping to draw her with me, pull her farther from my son. "There is nothing for you to claim. He is useless to you."

Still she stays, staring, and I fear her anger, her grief, might be strong enough to run the road of their frail connection; to call his consciousness to her.

Her grief. Yes, I can feel the storm of it.

Grief.

Perhaps I am wrong.

No.

"Choose another," I say. "Save some poor wretch from a suicide's noose. Give him the year you can offer."

"I chose — Gravin — above any other." Her voice is a ghost of itself; her pain so great that I must close myself to it.

"Another can meet your need," I say.

"He cannot."

"My need? How could you know my need, woman? How could you ... Your own son ... I would not trade places with you for all the riches in the world. He will curse you until his dying day."

"That day will come at its natural time."

I think that I see rage flash in eyes which have darkened until it is hard ebony I face.

"At its natural time," she says, and paces quick, angry steps, away and back. "Fool. He might die hunting this winter, or fall to thieves on the road. I would have protected him."

"For as long as he lived."

"Yes." The barb in my words has missed her, or she has chosen to ignore its sting. "For as long as he lived."

She looks toward the cottage for a moment, but she was born to be a warrior and will not show her wounds. Stiff-framed, she turns and walks away.

"Wait," I say. "Please wait."

She stops, staring straight ahead, and I run to fetch a leather bag from the shed which is my workshop. The bag is not large, but it clinks with the jostle of many bottles within.

I set it on the ground before her — an offering.

"Take this," I say. "When you find your next Chosen, mix what is in the green bottles and drink the mixture all at once."

The over-shine of her eyes is still there, but she smiles a smile so derisive that for a moment I can see myself as she sees me.

I am the unnatural one. I am the monster.

She sets a foot on top of the scuffed leather. There is no weight behind it, but it is heavy with threat. "Do you think that I am mad enough to drink your poison?"

"It is not poison." I plunge on to tell her the rest, squeezing everything into one rush before she can destroy a life's work. "The brown bottles are for your Chosen. Mix them and have him drink before he is Changed. The small clear vials are for — are for your son, should you have one."

"My son?"

"A girl will benefit through the potions taken by you and her father; a boy will still need help to survive."

She slides her foot away and looks at the lumpy bag. "A son never lives past his first week. The Old Ones saw to that. They ensured we could never be-

come a true race — with that."

It was one of the few wise things those accursed Sorcerers ever did. May the gods still be punishing them for the faith they broke, the trust they betrayed, but they were right in that one thing — twenty generations ago.

"Your ancestors were little more than beasts. The Old Ones stripped away the humanity of the women they used; left only intelligence warped to their purposes; but all of the Chosen, all of the fatherings, have undone ..."

I wonder if she is listening. Her attention is on the bag. She crouches and touches the leather softly. "A son," she says. "My son will not die?" She looks up. "Truly? And my Chosen?"

"I have woven spell-craft and herb-craft for years, looking for the answers in those bottles. If the answers are the right ones, your Chosen will need little Changing. He will live."

"If," she says. "You are not sure."

"If I was sure, I would not ... not have done what I have done. But it will do no harm, I promise you that. Take it, please, I have no need for it now."

"He is your only son?"

"I had one other, and a daughter. There was a plague ... My arts were not enough. The sickness took my husband last, two months before Gravin was born."

She lifts the sack from the ground, fingers spread wide. The bottles are silent cradled in her hands. "What do you want in return?"

"Only that you break whatever bond you have formed with Gravin. Do not leave him to yearn for what he cannot have."

"It is already done."

I catch my breath before it can betray the depth of my relief. "Thank you."

Her head moves from side to side; tight, controlled. "You left me no choice. I could not leave here without him otherwise."

I nod and say a prayer of thanks that the magic which had connected them was still weak enough to sever.

"No other price?" she asks, and pulls the bundle closer to her body.

"No other. May the man you Choose next live to see his children grown."

I can feel the power of her, scrutiny, and I am glad that I have not dropped the barrier between us. She must never know the other truth hidden in my heart.

"You are a strange woman," she says at last. Her thumbs caress the old leather

of the bag. "I wish ..." She looks once more toward the cottage. "I wish you had been sure."

She leaves without another word, and I watch her until she vanishes into the darkness of the forest edge. I have an urge to call after her, tell her I am sorry, that I truly wish her well.

I hold my tongue. She carries all that I can share. I can do nothing more to remedy the wrong that was done so long ago to the women of my Guild. They were foolish and vain enough to think that they could strike a fair bargain for power with the Sorcerers.

It cost them everything.

It almost cost me my son.



Artwork by Maurine Starkey

There has been too much payment through the centuries since that unholy pact. If my potions work, she of the chestnut eyes will be the first to be free.

May it be so.

I light the lamps in the cottage and check on Gravin. His breathing is quicker now. He will wake soon, well before midnight. He has not had a meal since he left for the market this morning, but there is time to prepare him a fine supper.

Time to pare the turnips and scrub the carrots, time to clean and pluck the bright-plumed rooster that gave its

blood to spread across an old blanket.

I will save the long feathers in tribute to that noble bird. And when the time comes, I will bind them into amulets, clasped with silver and laced with magic.

Birth gifts for my grandchildren.

*

BARBARA TARBOX was born just months before the turn of the half-century on the west coast of New York state and has lived there ever since. She has a Master's degree in Education and is certified to teach high school English forever (or until the next time they change the rules), and works as a sub-

stitute. About six years ago, she decided to stop writing stories in her head and try putting something on paper. One placement (and not a high one) in a Writers' Digest short story contest, and she became hopelessly addicted. Competing with her quirky little word-processor for attention are two dogs, three horses, and assorted goldfish.

She has neither "wonderful husband", nor "beautiful children", but finds all those paws, hooves and fins more than enough to clean up after.

MAURINE STARKEY lives in the San Francisco Bay area, where she exhibits her art at BayCon.

LETTERS

continued from page 31

don't really know any good way to explain it, but it drives me crazy to see these two used incorrectly in books and stories.

It's simple: "whom" is objective case. If it's the thing acted upon, or follows a preposition (e.g., "to whom"), use "whom". (Of course, three years of studying Russian with its six cases made English seem a little easier to understand.) — reh

Art Imitates Grammar?

Cat Walker, Rural Hall, NC

When I read "The Last Word" on saints and their symbols, I remembered a story I once heard of an artist that irritated the church fathers by painting Jesus with a **red** robe. Jesus was supposed to have a **blue** robe. The Virgin Mary wore a red robe. This symbolism was a visual language for the illiterate with its own syntax and grammar. Not only saints but whole stories have a standard symbolism. Artistically, the red robe made perfect sense. But to the fathers it was as if he had written out the Bible story and misspelled 'Jesus'. With all the recent talk of grammarian irritants I think we can all sympathize. (Isn't it amazing how things always seem to connect?) This tradition of symbols is being kept very much alive in the icons of the Orthodox Church. I recently saw a new icon of Mother Teresa of Calcutta. It was in a Byzantine style so there wasn't much of a likeness. But you'd know her anywhere by her symbols.

By the way, the term 'cartoon' originally referred to the line drawing used by an artist to transfer a picture to a

wall or panel for painting.

Cat, thanks for providing extra information about this topic that we non-artists know so little about. — reh

Douglas McCorison

I strongly disagree with Rachel's opinion in the "Last Word" column. She takes to task the people asking for more things being put into the public domain. The people who are complaining, and I am one of them, are *not* asking that authors, writers, creators, composers, and artists give up their copyrights. We realize that you who create need to make money to survive. The problem is that copyrights now do not expire until 75 years after the *death* of the creator. Yea, the third generation (using biblical generations of 25 years) is entitled to royalties for the creation. What has someone's great-grandchild done to deserve this? I can understand the rule 75 years ago of 25 years, so that the creator's survivors could get some post-humous help from their family. Even 50 years ago, when we changed it to 50 made some sense. But they (the corporate copyright owners) got the 75 year standard 25 years ago and now are complaining about *that*. The evidence suggests that the corporate copyright owners will never let go unless forced to. Why would they, they're

making money by charging more money than they could if the works were public domain.

The question I ask Rachel is: When does something like "Lord of the Rings" become properly part of our cultural heritage and open for anyone to use? There will always be people who want fine copies, so the publishers will still make money, just less of it. When does "Happy Birthday" become something that is free for everyone to sing? (It's still under copyright.) If you ask the corporate copyright holders, never. I don't think that's appropriate. I would roll it back to 50 years after the creator's death. Somehow, after all the money Disney Co. has made over Mickey Mouse, I don't feel sympathy for them when they want to keep Walt's original cartoons under copyright.

Thanks for reading my venting,

Doug, I stand by my original views. Creative works that continue to enrich the public imagination for decades after their creators' deaths should earn some money for their descendants (or other heirs — if the heirs are scholarship funds, will you change your mind?). They're certainly more valuable to most of us than stock shares in corporations or oil well leases or rents, the other kinds of things that people will their heirs; we get to enjoy them, and the heirs get money (and in some cases, that money encourages the heirs to keep the works available for purchase).

If "Happy Birthday"'s copyright holder isn't getting royalties, shame on us — or perhaps that person has chosen not to defend their copyright, in effect deeding the rights into the public domain. (But this is why Paramount fights so hard against even little TREK magazines — otherwise they would lose the right to control more lucrative uses, such as for movies.) — reh



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THE LAST WORD

I'd like to welcome all our new subscribers, and to give you a word of reassurance: Marion Zimmer Bradley's *FANTASY Magazine* does not sell its mailing list.

I hope you enjoyed all the stories and artwork, and Marion's comments about running her own magazine. If you like what you see, urge a friend to subscribe also.

Future issues will have cover stories by Susan Dexter and by Andre Norton, so keep your subscription current and don't miss a single issue. I have a list of new artists I want to try out, so you'll be seeing a wide range of talented artists' work in these pages.

Marion's health is probably not going to allow her to travel to any out-of-area conventions in 1999, but I expect to be at NorWesCon in Seattle at Easter, and probably at WisCon at Memorial Day. Marion should be at BayCon in San Jose.

Last September, we held a Fantasy Worlds Festival in Berkeley, and everybody had a great time. Jim Earley, one of the earliest members of the SCA and a skilled metalworker, demonstrated how armor is made and talked about trade during the middle ages. Margaret Davis taught calligraphy as well as playing harp and flute for an evening concert. I helped do a demo about weaving. I recently wrote up some information about weaving and posted it on my website, so if you're interested, check out <http://www.alexicom.net/rholmen/weaving.htm>. Please email me with any questions that the article doesn't answer. We hope to hold another Fantasy Worlds Festival, perhaps focussing on horses and their lore, or possibly ships and sailing; but we'll probably wait until fall 2000 before we hold the next convention. In the meantime, we'll keep you posted about our plans.

I'm also hoping there will be a Regency Assembly somewhere on the west coast this March, as there often is. See <http://www.regencyfriends.org> for details. (And if you are a Georgette Heyer fan, or wonder why anyone else might be, see <http://wodin.phys.unsw.edu.au/~sjh/GH/top.html>. Certainly if you enjoyed the interview with eluki bes shahar, you will want to check out this website as well as eluki's own, listed at the end of her bibliography.)

We have scheduled future interviews with Harry Turtle-dove, Megan Lindholm, and some other interesting fantasy writers.

As January approaches, I think about calendars. I look through the Levenger catalog (wonderful toys!), dreaming of a future when I might actually be organized; and I shop for a Letts #32S diary at my local office-supply store. The Letts books are wonderful, on thin "bible" paper with gold leaf on the edges, and a thin ribbon to mark your place. This book is for listing expenses and keeping track of events that have already happened. Last year, since I had been to London in the winter of 1997, I had the London version, with an Underground map and list of British holidays. Alas, my purse was stolen and so I don't have that one to enjoy, but I'm trying to get the 1999 London version for next year, with an email plea sent via the Letts web page.

Usually I have an appointment calendar, one big page per month, that I carry around. (DAW Books sends me a nice one

most years.) This fits into my laptop case if it's too big for my purse, and it's the one that really carries my life. Dental appointments, dinner engagements, phone numbers in the margins, fabric swatches — all go into this book. It's where I keep track of birthdays, too — now that my brother has married a woman who already had six children, I have seven nieces and nephews to remember as well as all my cousins' children.

Then there's my desk, which has a #17 calendar — you know the kind, where you turn over a new page for every day, and there are lines for writing down your appointments, the kind whose pages end up all over the streets in downtown San Francisco on New Year's Eve. I discovered that if I were willing to spend a little more money, I could buy a refill calendar that had a nice photograph on the left-hand page, a different photo for every weekday of the year! I used to get mine from Southworth, which seems to have gone out of business. But "Expressive Images item E417-50" is almost as nice, so I order three: one for my desk at work, one for my desk at home, and one to mail to my sister.

The desk calendar and at least one big, colorful wall calendar — wonderful pictures of the Himalayas; botanical plates of wildflowers; photos from the Bata Shoe Museum — are excuses to surround myself with art. One year, my sister and her husband made up calendars on their computer printer, decorated them with stickers and rubber stamps, and sent them out as Christmas gifts. I enjoyed mine all year.

Last, I make up one more "serious" calendar on my Mac. It's the whole year on two sides of a single sheet of 8-1/2 x 11 paper folded in thirds, so I can carry this one in almost any purse or notebook — kind of like a "Reader's Digest" version. (*Reminder to self: renew sub.*)

Free calendar

If you'd like a copy of my year-on-a-page calendar, send me an envelope addressed to yourself, with enough postage for 1 ounce by first class mail, and I'll mail you one. REH, P.O. Box 2916, Oakland, CA 94618-0116. (If you live outside the U.S., remember that I can't mail anything to you with a non-U.S. stamp on it.)

My personal web page may — **may** — have pages soon that you can print out to form your own calendar. But I haven't finished that one yet. The page will be linked to <http://www.alexicom.net/rholmen/start.html>.

I hope your holiday season was a pleasant one. "Peace on earth" is still the best wish for us all.

— Rachel Holmen



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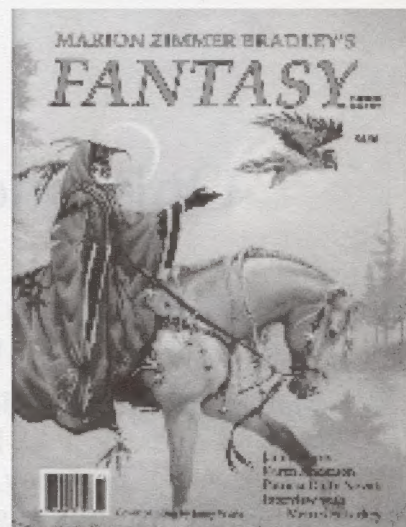
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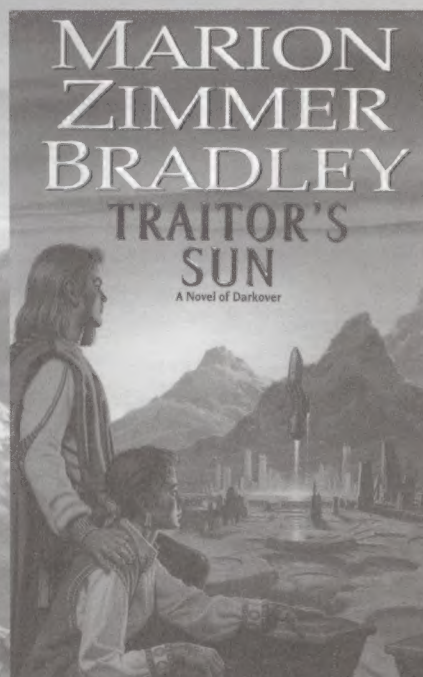
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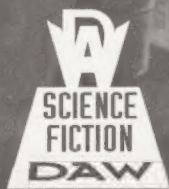


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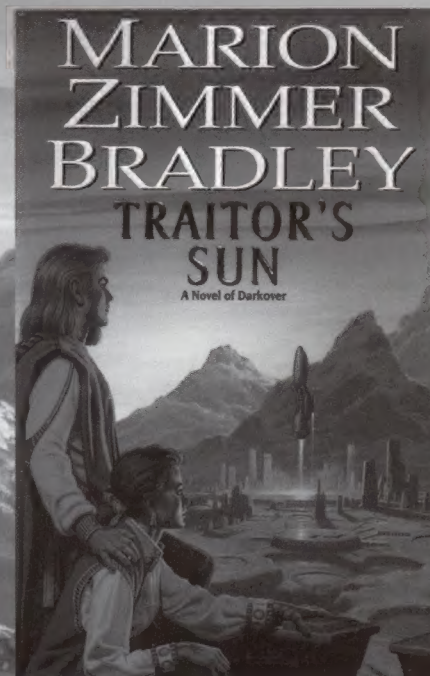
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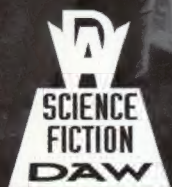


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